British Birds

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Peter Davis

Obituary: Evelyn Vida Baxter (1878-1959)

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Three Shillings

March 1960

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AN ILLUSTRATED MONTHLY JOURNAL

Edited by
P. A. D. Hollom E. M. Nicholson
I. J. Ferguson-Lees Stanley Cramp
Photographic Editor: Eric Hosking
Hon. Editors: W. B. Alexander N. F. Ticehurst
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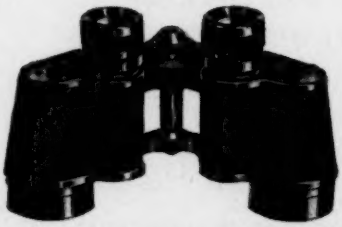

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British Birds

VOL. 53 NO. 3
MARCH 1960

Additions to the British and Irish List:

White-throated Sparrow, Black-and-White Warbler and Olive-backed Thrush

THE RECORDS COMMITTEE of the British Ornithologists' Union has reconsidered certain old records of American species over here in the light of present-day realisation that it is technically possible for a small land-bird to cross the Atlantic unaided. This view is influenced by the fact that some Passerines regularly fly between Europe and Greenland, and also by the fact that the question of ship-assisted passage can never be entirely eliminated so that one is faced with the alternatives of excluding all American records or none on this ground alone. Arrival here in an apparently free state must therefore be the main criterion, though records have to be judged individually on their merits and in each case it is necessary to assess the likelihood of escape from captivity, to consider the meteorological factors, and so on. The problems involved have been the subject of full discussions previously and the reader is referred to those (see *Brit. Birds,* 48: 146-147, and *Ibis,* 98: 156-157; also *Brit. Birds,* 53: 40-41).

As a result, the following two species are now added to the British and Irish List:

White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*). As recorded by F. Smalley in *Annals of Scottish Natural History* (1909: 206), a male White-throated Sparrow was shot at about noon on 18th May 1909 beside the lighthouse on Eilean Mòr, one of the Flannan Isles, Outer Hebrides. The date is consistent with the time of arrival and passage of this species in the Gulf of St. Lawrence area. Moreover, A. G. Forsdyke of the Meteorological Office has recently kindly examined the old weather records and supplied the following information:

"I conjecture that you may regard it as possible for a bird to cross the Atlantic in a limited area of favourable winds which itself travelled. If this is so, you may be interested in the following sequence of weather:

6th May 1909. Low cloud New York/Newfoundland area with south-west to west winds extending from there to 40°-50°N., 40°W.
7th May 1909. Strong south-west winds and low cloud 40°-45°N., 55°-40°W.
8th May 1909. West winds 40°-47°N., 45°-35°W.
9th May 1909. West winds 40°-50°N., 40°-25°W.
10th May 1909. South-west winds from 40°-50°N., 35°W. to 53°-60°N., 7°W.

I estimate that if a free balloon had been released from somewhere in the north-eastern United States on 6th May 1909 it might have arrived in western Scotland about four days later. Whether it is beyond the bounds of possibility that a bird might have flown across during that period I am unable to say: it would have had to be in the right position all the time to take advantage of favourable winds. The sequence quoted above is the only one in the first three weeks of May which seems at all possible."

The record of the White-throated Sparrow shot in Aberdeen on 17th August 1867 (see *Proc. Nat. Hist. Soc. Glasgow*, 1869, 1: 209-211, and *Brit. Birds*, 48: 189-190) has not been accepted. While considering this species, it is interesting to recall that two White-throated Sparrows stayed on board S.S. *Statendam* from the time she left New York on 27th September 1957 until within sight of these islands on 4th October 1957 (*Brit. Birds*, 51: 358).

Black-and-White Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*). It is recorded in *The Scottish Naturalist* (1937: 46) that a Black-and-White Warbler was picked up by F. Inkster near Scalloway, Shetland, about the middle of October 1936 following a period of stormy weather. It was forwarded to the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, and there preserved. It has never been suggested that this common North American migrant was an escape from captivity; it was evidently not accepted at that time because it was believed that small birds could not cross over the Atlantic without resting on ships and that this ruled them out regardless of any other consideration. In this case, however, the natural circumstances of the occurrence are supported by the fact that a Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) was recorded in Orkney on 22nd October 1936 (*Brit. Birds*, 31: 125).

We take this opportunity of drawing attention to the fact that the Black-and-White Warbler and White-throated Sparrow are the only two species now added to the British and Irish List following the publication of the paper "American land-birds in western Europe" by W. B. Alexander and R. S. R. Fitter (*Brit. Birds*, 48: 1-14). That paper listed the old records, both good and bad, and drew attention to the need for them to be re-assessed in the light of the considerations by which such records are judged nowadays. Besides the two species mentioned above, several other of the more likely old records of American birds have also been reviewed, but they have not been accepted because it has been impossible to know the full circumstances so long afterwards. It must therefore be stressed that no other

species or records mentioned by Alexander and Fitter should be regarded as added to the British and Irish List, apart from the records already accepted before the publication of their paper. Unfortunately this has not been fully realised, and even the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of 1957 has thus included several American birds as occurring in Great Britain and Ireland although the records have not been officially accepted over here.

In forthcoming issues we expect to give full publication to certain other species recorded in Great Britain and Ireland for the first time in 1957 and 1958, but there remains one other older occurrence which has been accepted by the B.O.U. Records Committee and which should be mentioned here:

Olive-backed Thrush (*Hylocichla ustulata*). On 26th May 1956 a freshly dead Olive-backed Thrush was found at Blackrock lighthouse, Co. Mayo, by W. P. Roche, assistant keeper there. It is now preserved in the National Museum, Dublin, but it was first of all sent to the American Museum of Natural History where it was assigned to the race *H. u. swainsoni* which breeds from north-central Canada to western Virginia (see *Irish Nat. Journ.*, xii: 172-173, 270).

The irruption of tits in autumn 1957

By S. Cramp, A. Pettet and J. T. R. Sharrock

(Continued from page 77: it was stated last month that this paper would appear in two parts, but its length has made it necessary for the discussion section to be held over until April)

MOVEMENTS OBSERVED ELSEWHERE IN EUROPE

The nature and timing of the main coastal movements in the British Isles, the ringing recoveries and the analyses of the climatic conditions suggest that a large area of N.W. Europe must also have been affected. The information kindly supplied by a number of European correspondents confirms this.

Belgium and Luxembourg

The most marked movements were recorded in those parts of Europe nearest to the British Isles—Belgium, Holland, Germany and Luxembourg. In Belgium there was a notable passage of tits, both along the coasts and in the interior (R. Verheyen *in litt.*). At the ringing

station at Saive-Liège (Ruwet 1958) the annual passage of tits was exceptionally heavy in 1957, with hundreds moving S.W. and Blue Tits outnumbering Great by about five to two. This movement was first noted in early September and between 10th September and 20th October was observed every day from dawn, except during heavy rain. On 21st September it was very heavy and caused great agitation in the local populations of Dunnocks (*Prunella modularis*) and Long-tailed Tits. The Coal Tit is a regular migrant at Saive-Liège from end-August to end-October, but nothing unusual about this species was mentioned in 1957. However, there was an abnormal passage of Coal Tits in Flanders (*Gerfaut,* 48: 184) and they were particularly numerous during the winter in the woods at Zoute, most of them leaving at the beginning of March (Lippens 1958).

Jays (*Garrulus glandarius*) were seen migrating at several places in Belgium between mid-September and mid-October; a considerable passage was noted at Saive-Liège from early September, with peaks on 27th September and 6th October, and is said to have been general in E. Belgium (Ruwet 1958). There was also an extraordinary movement of Jays in Luxembourg from 3rd September to 7th October, heaviest in the early mornings (Hulten 1958).

On 21st May 1958 a strong return migration of Jays travelling east was seen in Belgium at Knokke-sur-Mer (Lippens 1958). Returning Great Tits were also noted at Jupille-Liège on 26th March (*Gerfaut,* 48: 184).

Holland

In Holland both Blue and Great Tits were seen in the late summer in areas where they do not breed, and in September and October the passage of these two species and Coal Tits was heavier than usual along the coast (H.N. Kluyver *in litt.*). J. Taapken (*in litt.*) adds that other birds were also involved—Long-tailed Tits, Redpolls (*Carduelis flammea*), Jays and Great Spotted Woodpeckers (*Dendrocopos major*). Further details have been published by G. Bosch, C. Swennen and J. Taapken (*Vanellus,* 1958: 488-489; *Het Vogeljaar,* 5: 100; 6: 56-57 and 75), but only some of the more striking observations can be given here. Movement of Great Tits was seen on Terschelling as early as 15th August, and Coal Tits were first noted near Amsterdam on 9th September, but the main passage was later in September and October. Many tits arrived at Middelharnis, on the coastal island of Over Flakkee, on 5th October, and then on the 6th some two thousand (mainly Blue) tried to fly W.N.W. across the sea at Den Helder, leaving behind them in the dunes about a thousand Coal, numbers of Great and Long-tailed and more Blue. On 20th October a strong passage of the three commonest species, with some Crested Tits (*Parus*

cristatus) and Marsh Tits was seen along the south coast of the IJsselmeer. At Delden there was a strong movement of Blue Tits in the second half of September and the first week of October, mainly in a W.S.W. direction. Coal Tits were observed in many areas, but there were fewer reports of Long-tailed and Crested Tits.

Small parties of Jays were seen moving W.S.W. and S.W. at Deventer, in central Holland, in mid-September, and at Amsterdam from 20th September to early October. Later, in November and December, movements were observed at Middelharnis. The numbers of Jays in Holland in 1957 were, however, very much smaller than those reported in the major influx there in 1955.

Return migration of tits was noted mainly in February and March in an easterly direction; on 30th March (corresponding with the heavy late March movements in Kent) some 500 Great Tits were seen flying east between 18.00 and 19.15 at Middelharnis, and passage was noted on the same day at Hilversum and The Hague. At Middelharnis also, on this day, 35 Jays were seen flying high to the S.E. (Taapken 1958).

Germany

In Germany the movements appear to have been observed mainly on the N.W. coast and adjoining islands. On Heligoland, where there is a small passage of Blue and Great Tits in most years, some 230 Great Tits and 500 Blue, with a few Coal and Long-tailed, were recorded between 22nd September and 15th November. The first Great Tit appeared on 22nd September and the first Blue and Coal four days later, the invasion reaching its peak on 11th and 12th October. Most birds arrived from the north and left in a southerly direction. The majority apparently stayed only a short while, as few were re-trapped, but two Great and one Blue wintered. Of the 104 Blue Tits trapped, 95 were first-winter birds, but rather surprisingly more than half of the 59 Great Tits ringed were adults. On the coastal islands of Neuwerk and Wangeroog the peak dates were also 11th and 12th October, but at Wilhelmshaven maximum numbers occurred about a week later. Blue and Great Tits were seen on the light vessel "Borkumriff" in October and November. On 23rd November some 36 Long-tailed Tits, of which about a third were "white-headed", were recorded moving slowly south-west near Bremerhaven.

No return migration was observed on Heligoland, but strong easterly movements of Great and Blue Tits, with a few Marsh, were seen at Wilhelmshaven on 28th March and 3rd and 25th April 1958 (Vauk *in press*). Further details of tit movements on the coastal islands of Neuwerk, Wangeroog and Nordeney are given by Ringleben (1958). Great Tits were the most numerous, it being estimated that between five and ten thousand passed through Wangeroog from 9th

to 15th October, and flocks were seen until early November. Passage of Great Tits was also noticed inland at a number of places on the N.W. German plain—Aurich, Osnabrück, Brunswick and Schleswig-Holstein. On Neuwerk, where many Great Tits occurred on 11th and 12th October, Blue Tits were first seen on 20th September and Coal on the 17th. Both species occurred on the coast and inland in the same areas as the Great Tits, but in smaller numbers; peak movements on the coast were from 11th to 19th October. Passage of Long-tailed Tits was observed at Osnabrück from the end of October until early November. Ringleben considers that the irruptions were the result of the mild winter of 1956-57 and of a good breeding season in 1957 due to favourable weather.

France and Spain

We have unfortunately been able to gather very little direct information from France. At Ushant, however, two ringing camps were operating from 23rd August to 4th September and from 17th to 28th September. During these periods they trapped 56 Blue Tits and small numbers of Great Tits, Bullfinches (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*), Siskins (*Carduelis spinus*) and Great Spotted Woodpeckers. The tits invaded the island at the end of September and disappeared in early October; fishermen said that they came from the sea and rested on the boats (*The Ring*, no. 13: 285). Flocks of Blue Tits were also seen migrating near Dijon at the end of September (C. A. Blume *in litt.*), large numbers of tits were noted in the Midi (P. Géroudet *in litt.*), and E. D. H. Johnson informs us that when driving through western France from 2nd to 4th October he found tits very numerous, Blue rather outnumbering Great. The largest numbers were noted in the flat, marshy areas to the north of La Rochelle, and the last evidence of passage was observed at Santillana del Mar, on the north coast of Spain, which could have been reached by coasting movements without crossing any mountainous areas. Elsewhere the Pyrenees may have acted as a barrier, for F. Bernis (*in litt.*) says that he received no reports of any unusual numbers from the Iberian peninsula.

Switzerland

In Switzerland Paul Géroudet (*in litt.*) informs us that there was a heavy migration of Blue, Great and Coal Tits in a general S.W. and S. direction; this was observed in the Alps and Jura, as well as the lower-lying areas. The published summary (Géroudet 1958) shows that the very marked movement of Great Tits began about 18th-22nd September and continued until the end of October, with peak numbers mainly in the middle of the latter month. A mixed flock of Coal and Great Tits was seen at a height of 2,600 m. (over 8,000 feet) in Valais. The

first passage of Blue and Coal Tits was reported at the end of August, continuing in each case until the end of October. The movement of Coal Tits was rather irregular, but very marked in some districts, at least 4,500 being counted at Cernier (Neuchatel) on 21st September. Flocks of Long-tailed Tits were observed at several places in Switzerland in October and November, while Nuthatches (*Sitta europaea*), Treecreepers (*Certhia familiaris*), Marsh Tits, Redpolls and Great Spotted Woodpeckers occurred in small numbers. Goldcrests, with a few Firecrests (*Regulus ignicapillus*), were also noted on passage, sometimes with tits. There was a marked movement of Siskins in October and Jays were seen in many localities from mid-September to the end of October: the Jay passage reached its height about the 6th of the latter month when between four and five hundred were seen at the Col de Bretolet. Siskins, Jays and Great Tits were abundant in W. Switzerland during the winter.

In their report on observations made at the Col de Cou and Col de Bretolet during 1951-57, Godel and Crousaz (1958) state that in most years a more pronounced migration of tits was observed at these two passes (leading to France at some 6,400 feet) than in the lower country. In the autumn of 1957 very large numbers of Great and Coal Tits and fewer Blue were trapped there (1,625, 1,251 and 407 respectively), a large proportion being birds of the year. Godel and Crousaz reach the provisional conclusion that Blue Tits are usually most numerous in September and Great Tits from the beginning of October. (It will be remembered that Great Tit passage was also later in Britain.) A number of the tits ringed at the Col de Bretolet were recovered in the winter of 1957-58 in southern France between the River Rhône and the Alpine frontier with Italy, some reaching the Mediterranean coast; in addition, two Coal, one Blue and one Great were recovered in N. Italy. Another Coal Tit was found in May 1958 at Wurttemburg in Germany (about 210 miles N.E.) and a Great Tit trapped at the Col de Bretolet during the irruption had been ringed as a nestling in June 1957 in Czechoslovakia (some 475 miles E.N.E.).

Scandinavia and the Baltic

The Scandinavian countries appear to have been little affected by the movements. G. Svärdson (*in litt.*) suggests that the birds invading Britain in the autumn of 1957 (especially the Blue and Great Tits) came from an area delimited in the north by the southern tip of Sweden. In Scandinavia, passage of Blue Tits was obvious only at Falsterbo, on the south-west tip of Sweden; there more than five hundred were ringed. A. G. Parsons (*in litt.*) says that very heavy movements of Blue, Great and Coal Tits occurred there at the end of September, and a further exodus of the first two species in early October; there was

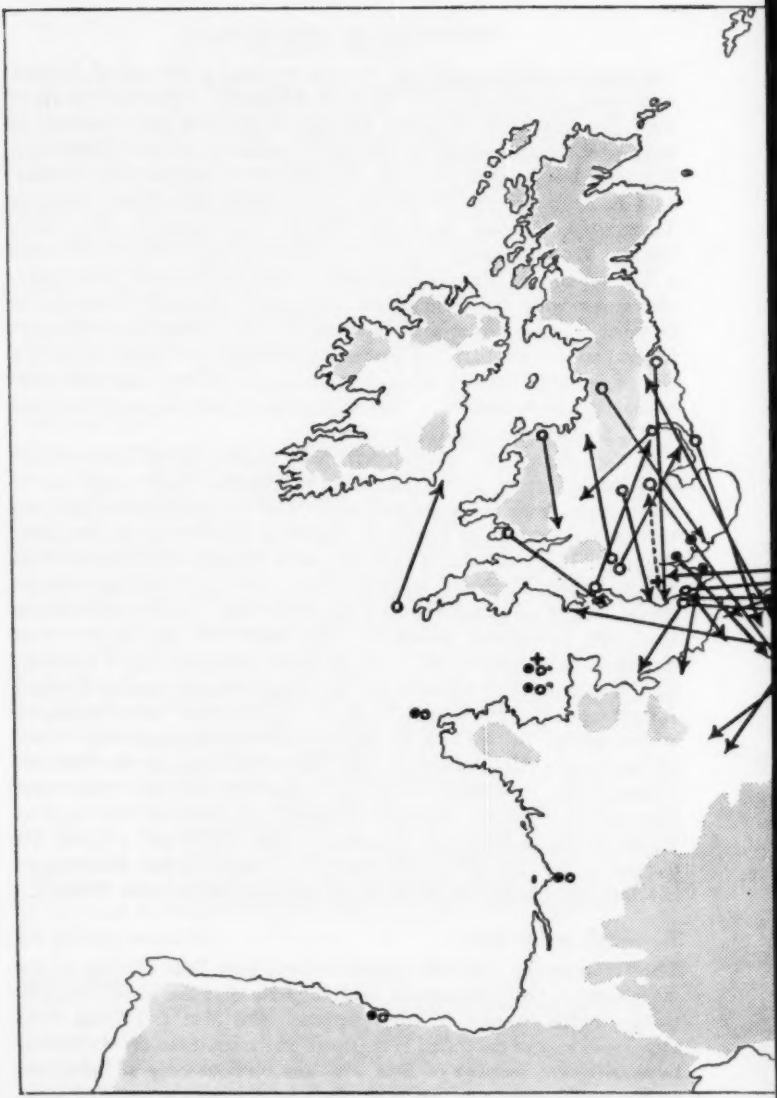
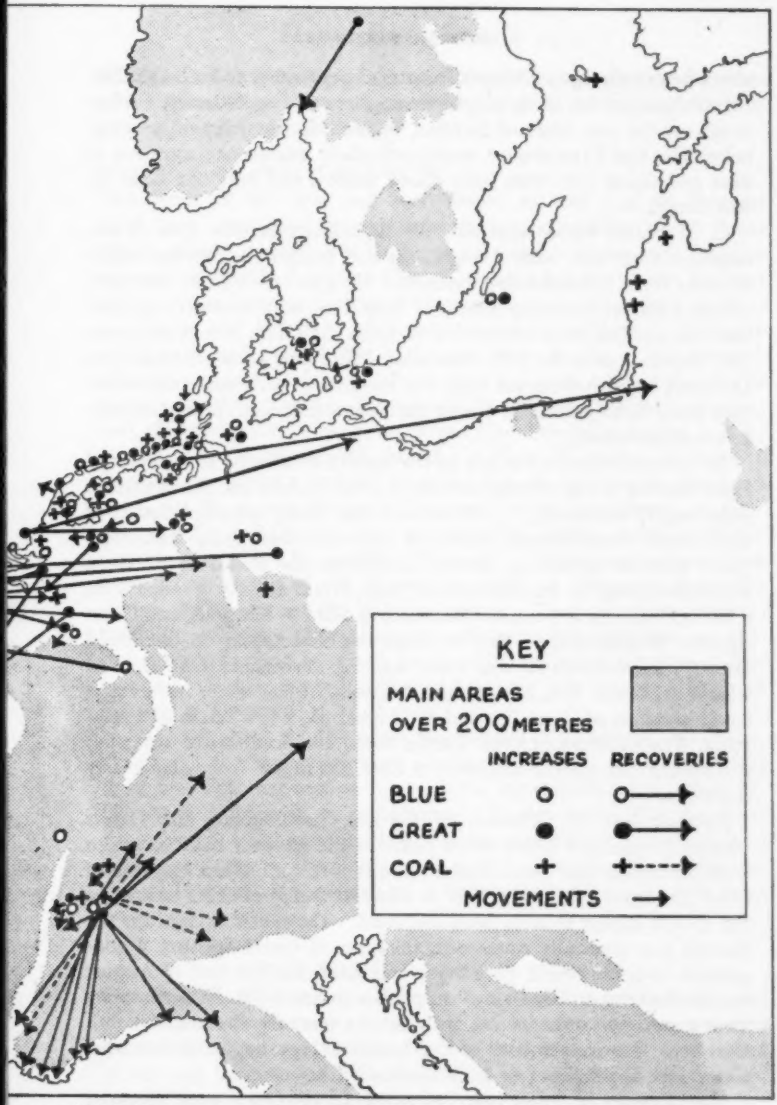


FIG. 11. Localities where movements and increases of Blue, Great and Coal Tits (*Parus caeruleus, major* and *ater*) were reported on the Continent in autumn 1957, together with the more important recoveries of ringed birds both there and in the British Isles (see also Figs. 4, 5, 9 and 10). Note that the tits from the low-lying



parts of N.W. Europe appear to have kept almost entirely to land below 200 metres, while many Central European ones seem to have passed through much more mountainous areas. On the evidence available the two irruptions appear to have been largely distinct geographically

also a heavy passage of Siskins from 23rd September to 10th October. An analysis of the birds ringed during 1947-57 at Ottenby, further north on the east coast of Sweden, showed that in 1957 only Long-tailed Tits and Treecreepers were particularly numerous; numbers of Blue and Great Tits were little above normal and only one Coal Tit was ringed.

C. A. Blume writes that on 29th September he saw four or five hundred Blue Tits, with a few Great and Long-tailed, trying vainly to cross from Falsterbo to Denmark. He also says that in Denmark on 6th October similar numbers of Blue Tits, with some Great, Coal and Long-tailed, were attempting to cross the Great Belt at Stigsnaes (W. Zeeland) in a W./S.W. direction. Numbers of tits breeding in Denmark in 1957 were not high, but these birds were more numerous than usual in Copenhagen during the winter (although not apparently in woodland areas).

No unusual numbers of any of the species concerned were reported from Norway (Holger Holgersen *in litt.*) and Finland also seems to have been largely unaffected. J. Koskimies has kindly supplied details of the Finnish winter census figures in 1957-58; these show that, compared with the preceding winter (Koskimies and Rajala 1957), there was little change in the numbers of Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits, a fall in Coal Tits and marked decreases in Siskins, Redpolls, and Great Spotted Woodpeckers. Reports from the observatory on the Åland Isles (P. Linkola) show that there was *less* movement than usual of Blue Tits, Great Tits, Siskins and Redpolls; there were, however, a small invasion of Great Spotted Woodpeckers, a few flocks of Long-tailed Tits in October (this species does not occur there annually) and a short but definite irruption of Coal Tits in late August and early September.

Further east, E. Kumari, of Estonia, summarising the results obtained from fifty observation posts in the Eastern Baltic between 16th September and 15th October, also reported a distinct invasion of Coal Tits from 20th September to mid-October, but other species of tits do not appear to have been involved. There was an appreciable, though not especially numerous, invasion of Great Spotted Woodpeckers over the whole East Baltic area from the first half of August to mid-September, but later at only a few points in W. Estonia; sixty were seen flying over the sea at Puise in a westerly direction on 10th October. Jay movements of the invasion type began in this area about 20th September (*per* K. Williamson).

No increases or movements of a special character were reported from Iceland (Finnur Gudmundsson), Poland (K. W. Szarski), Eastern Germany (Wolfgang Makatsch), Hungary (A. Keve), Yugoslavia (R. Csornai and R. Kroneisl-Rucner), Rumania (J. Korodi Gal and

Kohl Stefan) or Italy (Sergio Frugis). In Czechoslovakia the numbers of Great and Blue Tits were relatively high, but no large movements were reported (F. J. Turček).

Recoveries of tits ringed on the Continent

Recoveries of tits that had been ringed at the Col de Bretolet have been mentioned above in the section on Switzerland. Some others of birds marked in N.W. Europe are also available. J. Taapken informs us (*in litt.*) that three Great Tits ringed in the nest in Holland in 1957 were recovered between November 1957 and January 1958 in N. France and Belgium, while two ringed in Holland in February and March 1958 were found in the next two months in N. Germany (Saxony and Mecklenburg). Turning to Belgium, a Great Tit ringed there in October 1957 was recovered in France near Paris in November, and one marked in February 1958 was found some 220 miles E.N.E. in Germany (Westphalia) in March; a Blue Tit ringed in Belgium in 1957 was found 115 miles E. near Liège in April 1958 (Verheyen 1958, 1959). An adult Great Tit ringed at Wilhelmshaven in Germany in December 1957 was recovered at Neman, near the Baltic Coast of the U.S.S.R., in February 1959. Unfortunately there have been no recoveries of any of the tits ringed in Sweden at Falsterbo during the movement (R. Nilsson *in litt.*). There were also two interesting recoveries of Jays ringed in Belgium (see Verheyen *op. cit.*): one marked in June 1957 was found in N. France in October of that year, and another ringed in September 1957 was reported some 78 miles E. in Germany in April 1958.

Although there may be other recoveries still to appear, the above, together with the reports from observers (see Fig. 11), suggest that there was little connection between the movements of tits in N.W. Europe and those in central Europe. It also seems that the birds from the low-lying areas in N.W. Europe kept almost entirely to land below 200 metres above sea-level in their movements, whilst the central European tits passed, as in Switzerland, through much more mountainous districts.

OTHER BIRDS IN UNUSUAL NUMBERS

Certain other species occurred in unusual numbers on the coast and elsewhere in the autumn of 1957 and information on these was also requested in order to ascertain whether their movements were linked in any way with those of the tits. They included birds which are of regular but very variable autumn occurrence along our shores—Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*), Firecrest (*R. ignicapillus*), Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*), Siskin (*C. spinus*), Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*), Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*) and Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*). However,

although on occasion they appeared with the tits, an examination of the peak dates shows that there was no general correlation. It has not therefore been thought necessary to deal with these species in detail, although some points are worthy of mention.

Goldcrests, Firecrests, Redpolls and Siskins

Goldcrests were reported in small numbers from some widespread coastal areas—Spurn (Yorkshire) round to Lundy (Devon) and Great Saltee (Co. Wexford)—in late August and early September, and passage continued in many places on the coasts of England, Wales, Isles of Scilly, Channel Islands and eastern Ireland into October and even November: one of a number recorded on light vessels off the Norfolk coasts was seen at Smith's Knoll as late as 3rd November. Numbers were said to be above average at Dungeness (Kent), Portland (Dorset), Bardsey (Caernarvonshire) and Great Saltee, but were less than normal at Spurn. Firecrests, which occurred from 20th September, were reported as noticeably above average only at Portland.

The Redpoll movements may have involved the resident British form *C. f. disruptis*,* some of which are known to emigrate, or *C. f. cabaret* which breeds in central Europe and appears here as a winter visitor and passage migrant (Bannerman 1953). It is unlikely, however, that these two races were often distinguished and only a few odd Mealy Redpolls (*C. f. flammea*), the northern form which arrives in large numbers in some invasion years, were identified. Redpolls were said to have been more numerous than usual in 1957 at most observatories and many other coastal areas on the east and south coasts of England; odd birds were also seen at the Isle of May (Fife) and Saltee where they are normally rare, and there was one *cabaret* at Fair Isle where this form is even rarer. The first Redpolls were reported on the east coast in early September—Isle of May (5th), Spurn (8th), Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire (6th) and Cley, Norfolk (3rd)—but it was not until the second half of the month that any were noted on the south coast. Peak dates were variable, with some tendency to be later in the south—Gibraltar Point, 16th and 22nd-23rd September; Spurn, 5th-6th October; Dungeness, 12th and 25th October; and Portland, 20th October. This may indicate passage down the coast, but observed coasting movements were confusing. At Dungeness Redpolls were seen going south to the Point and then flying between W. and N.; at other places on the south coast both east and west movements occurred, while at Portland some were seen to emigrate and others coasted west. The three recoveries all showed movement out of the country: two adults marked at Dungeness in

*See the First Report of the Taxonomic Sub-Committee of the B.O.U., *Ibis*, 98: 167.

October and November 1957 were found in Belgium and N. France in November, and a first-winter male ringed at Beddington (Surrey) in late September was recaptured in Belgium in December. There are two earlier records of Redpolls trapped in Holland in October being recovered in England in a subsequent breeding-season.

Siskins were also first reported from the east coast, at Spurn on 31st August and at the Isle of May, Gibraltar Point and Cley in early September, and there were no records from the south coast until the second half of the month. At Spurn and Gibraltar Point numbers were above average in 1957 (both had peak passage on 12th September), but they were below at Fair Isle and the Isle of May. Only a few were seen at Dungeness, but many were reported at Sandwich Bay (Kent) between 18th and 27th September (42 on the latter date), and Portland had an unprecedented year for this species. Lundy similarly recorded the largest passage since 1949, lasting from 7th to 22nd October.

Jays

Two other species prominent in the autumn of 1957 are much more irregular in their movements—the Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*) and the Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*). Ticehurst (1932) gives evidence suggesting autumn influxes of Continental Jays into Suffolk, especially in 1910 when other south-eastern counties were also affected; then an influx occurred in Kent in 1947, and a large movement observed in Hampshire in October 1935 may have been due to birds from N. France, although the difficulty of separating Jays of W. Europe (especially Belgium and France) makes proof difficult at times (Bannerman *op. cit.*).* In early September 1957 there were reports of increases and movements in S. England which may have been due to local birds, but towards the middle of the month there were clear signs of an influx. Between the 14th and 16th a flock was seen flying in from the N.E. at Broomfield (Kent), five flew in from the S. near Rye (Sussex), three appeared to come in off the sea at Aldwick Bay (Sussex) and ten were seen flying low over the waves from the S.E. at Sandwich Bay (Kent). The main invasion was from 19th September to the end of the month, affecting a considerable part of S.E. England (Fig. 12). Most coastal reports were from Kent, but in Norfolk a westerly movement, mainly of single birds, was seen at Horsey from 28th September and some birds came in from the sea there. Near the Suffolk coast, at Badingham, a large increase was noted from 23rd September to 23rd October, and at Ingatestone (Essex) a record number of between 600 and 1,000 Jays was seen moving S.W. on 21st September, the movement continuing on a

*The B.O.U. Taxonomic Sub-Committee recommended that English, Scottish and adjacent Continental populations be treated as a cline (*Ibis*, 98: 163).

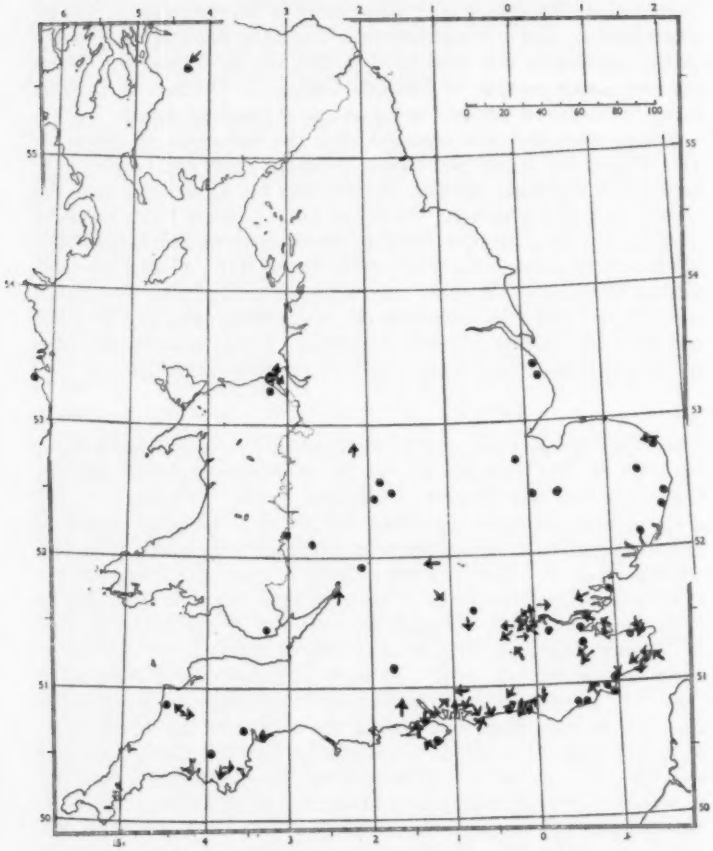


FIG. 12. Localities where movements and increases of Jays (*Garrulus glandarius*) were reported in Great Britain and Ireland from September to November 1957

reduced scale the next day. In the London area, small parties were seen moving in varying directions (mainly S.W. to N.W.) from 20th September to 13th October.

The S.W. movements here and in Kent might account for the movements on or near the Sussex coast, where, although some birds were seen moving inland, most observed towards the end of the month

were moving between S. and S.E. These directions would have taken them out of the country again, although none was seen to fly out to sea.

In the south-west, an influx near Bude (Cornwall) was noted as early as 20th September and isolated movements occurred in Devon in late September and early October. These may reflect the good breeding season reported there, for there are few observations to connect them with the invasion in S.E. England.

There were some reports of movements or increases, mainly in October or November, in central and western England, the most striking being a northward passage in the area of Slimbridge (Gloucestershire) between 1st and 5th October, with over fifty seen flying north in one hour on the 3rd. The reports are too few, however, to decide whether the increases in Cheshire and Flint in early October (with flocks of up to 46 birds moving in various directions at the mouth of the Dee on 4th and 5th) were due to immigrants or local birds wandering after the good breeding season reported in the Merseyside area (*Merseyside Nat. Assocn. Bird Report 1957-58*). During the last week of October about six Jays appeared at Tallaght, near Dublin, where they are normally very rare, and stayed for the winter.

Three Continental specimens were identified, all taken in Kent, two on 23rd September and one in late November. There are no recoveries away from the place of ringing of Jays trapped during these movements. In earlier years four ringed as nestlings were found more than ten miles away (15 to 48 miles, between S.W. and N.N.W.), and a full-grown bird ringed at Dungeness in October 1955 was recovered in Holland in the following June. There were reports from a number of coastal areas in Sussex, Hampshire and Dorset in late April and May 1958 suggesting that some Jays may have been attempting to return (see *Brit. Birds*, 51: 252 and 277, and *The Sussex Bird Report 1958* for fuller details).

Great Spotted Woodpeckers

Small numbers of Great Spotted Woodpeckers were noted in many coastal areas in 1957 (in several of which the species had previously been unrecorded or only rarely seen). Observations came mainly from the east and south of England, from Northumberland to Dorset, but there were also two such records from the west (Skokholm, Pembrokeshire; Hilbre, Cheshire) and one from Ireland (Great Saltee). Most were seen in September and October, with a few into November, and there was no noticeable concentration of records on any particular days. Occurrences as early as July and August in a few areas suggest that some at least were wandering British birds. There were widespread reports inland of increases or appearances in

places where not usually seen. On 10th November seven birds were seen flying north over open country near Cannock, Staffs.

Continental birds may however have been involved in some of the later coastal influxes. Actual movements were rarely reported; most were coasting movements, but occasionally birds were observed flying inland, and on three occasions they were said to have flown in from the sea—at Cley on 6th September, at St. Catherine's on 16th November and at Pett Level, Sussex, on 28th November. No definite Continental sub-species were reported, however, and the six trapped at Dungeness were all referred to the British form on bill size. Previous invasions have been of the Northern form, affecting mainly the east coast of Scotland and of England north of N. Suffolk (Witherby *et al.*, 1938); this was clearly the case in 1949, the last tit invasion year, when Fair Isle, Isle of May, Spurn and Gibraltar Point were chiefly affected (with an odd bird on Lundy) and all birds definitely identified were of the Northern race (*Brit. Birds*, 43: 205-17). There was a much more southerly distribution to the 1957 records, and in view of coastal movements in Holland, and occurrences in Guernsey and Ushant, it is possible that some may have crossed over to S.E. England. Ringing recoveries do not help as no bird ringed during these movements was recovered more than seven miles away.

Treecreepers, Bullfinches and Nuthatches

Three other species deserve brief mention. The British form of the Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris britannica*) is resident but wanders occasionally to coastal islands. Odd birds were reported from a wide range of coastal areas in the autumn of 1957 (including Steep Holm in the Bristol Channel, Lundy, Skokholm and Bardsey) and there were scattered reports of increases inland; one trapped at Dungeness on 10th October was thought to be either *C. f. familiaris* or the intermediate *C. f. macrodactyla*. There were many reports of increased numbers of Bullfinches (*P. pyrrhula*) inland, but, apart from a single bird on 20th October at St. Catherine's Point (Isle of Wight) and four flying south at the Naze (Essex) on 26th October, the only coastal observations concerned a number at Dungeness from 17th October to 16th December, one of which was seen to fly in from the sea on 16th November. All those trapped there, however, were apparently of the British form. Finally, increased numbers of Nuthatches (*Sitta europaea*) were reported from a few inland areas, but there was no real evidence of movement on the coasts.

SUMMARY OF THE 1957-58 TIT MOVEMENTS

It is clear from the foregoing that movements of tits occurred on an unusual scale in N.W. Europe in the autumn of 1957. Blue Tits

were the most abundant species, but considerable numbers of Great and Coal were also involved. Long-tailed Tits were affected to a much smaller degree, and other species even less. In the British Isles there were signs of unusual numbers and local movements of Blue and Great Tits from late June and these continued on an increasing scale into September. Similar phenomena were noted in some Continental countries. In September strong passage was observed in Belgium, Holland and N. and W. Germany, mainly on the coast but also in some inland areas, leading to a major irruption into the British Isles, which started in mid-September. These movements increased, reaching a peak in most areas in the first week of October and continuing throughout the month and into early November.

In N.W. Europe the movements appeared to be largely W. and S.W., but in the British Isles both the invaders and many native birds moved mainly between W. and N., reaching the west coasts of England and Wales, northern England and, in very much smaller numbers, some parts of Scotland and Ireland. In the British Isles Blue Tits were the commonest; Great Tits came second in the southern half of England and Wales, and Coal in the north. The ringing evidence, the Continental observations and the weather analyses suggest that the tits invading these islands came from a large lowland area of N.W. Europe, including N. France, Belgium, Holland, N. and W. Germany, Denmark and the southern tip of Sweden (but not the remainder of Scandinavia). There is some evidence that birds from this area also moved south into western France, but did not penetrate far beyond the Pyrenees. Blue, Great and Coal Tits from some parts of central Europe (probably southern and central Germany and Czechoslovakia) also appear to have been affected, although the evidence is more scanty, but these birds pushed mainly S.W. through Switzerland into S. and E. France and N. Italy. These movements involved the crossing of mountainous areas, often at considerable heights, whereas those in N.W. Europe were almost entirely restricted to lowland districts (Fig. 11).

During the winter numbers of tits were high in parts of the British Isles (as well as some Continental countries). Return movements were gradual and protracted, but there is evidence from the east and south coasts of England that fairly large numbers of Blue and Great Tits (but few Coal) returned to the Continent in late March and April, continuing on a small scale into May. Return passage in an easterly direction was observed in Belgium, Holland and Germany in March and April, and movements were particularly heavy there and in S. England at the end of March.

THE EVIDENCE OF PREVIOUS TIT IRRUPTIONS

In neither of the two most important recent discussions of irruptions (Lack 1954, Svärdson 1957) were Great and Blue Tits considered. There seems little doubt, however, that both should be regarded as true irruption species which undertake large-scale movements at irregular intervals and in varying numbers and directions. The spectacular irruptions of birds like Waxwings (*Bombycilla garrulus*) and Crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra*) have long attracted attention, but the fluctuations of common breeding species are not easy to establish: inland passage is readily overlooked even now and coastal movements could not be fully appreciated until the time of the present chain of observatories and watchers. However, there are sufficient indications of movements in the past to confirm that the events of 1957-58 were not unique.

The earliest record of such an irruption was at Heligoland over a hundred years ago. Gätke (1895) stated that Great Tits used to appear on the island in large numbers (though apparently such big-scale movements became rarer after the early 1860's) and that from late September to December 1847 a major invasion of Great Tits, with Blue and a few Coal, took place; the last big movement he recorded there was in 1878, when these three species and Long-tailed Tits were involved. In the British Isles most of the old reports were from the eastern coastal counties of England and from Scotland. Nelson (1907) wrote that there were often considerable arrivals of Blue and Great Tits on the Yorkshire coast in autumn, from mid-September to mid-November. He particularly mentioned 1878 (when one of the big movements on Heligoland occurred); then there were unusual numbers of Great Tits in the latter part of October, many being seen with Blue Tits and Wrens at Spurn and Teesmouth on 30th October. Increases of Great Tits were also noted on the Yorkshire coast in 1883, 1884 and 1886 and there were invasions of both Blue and Great in 1889 and 1901. Nelson was one of the few to mention unusual numbers inland, and his description of their behaviour parallels that of many observers in the autumn of 1957—"Inland the Blue Tit has been seen settled on such unusual places as house tops in the centre of large towns during the early mornings of October, which is significant of its being newly arrived, and at this period it may also be frequently observed in the trees right in the heart of our busiest towns." He stated that there was no evidence of any Continental Coal Tits in Yorkshire, but Bolam (1912) thought that some of the odd wandering Coal Tits appearing in Northumberland between October and March had possibly come over the sea and mentioned that they were more frequent than usual in 1898 and 1899. At Spurn, three Continental Great Tits were caught

in October 1947 and March 1948 (Chislett 1953), and on 1st October 1948 a number of Blue Tits trapped there were considered to belong to this race (Chislett and Ainsworth 1958).

Further south, in Lincolnshire, Caton Haigh observed large movements of Blue Tits on the north-east coast in October 1898, 1899, 1919 and 1923 (Smith and Cornwallis 1955). In Suffolk, Ticehurst (1932) described the large numbers of tits, mainly Great but also Blue and Long-tailed, seen moving south in October 1910, at which time Great Tit immigration was recorded in many areas from Shetland to the Isles of Scilly. He gave details of the passage of all four species there in other years, but only in the case of the Great Tit did he identify birds of the Continental form. Gurney (1884) claimed that two or three specimens of the Continental Coal Tit had occurred in Norfolk, and Stevenson (1866) quoted the apparent return movement of Great Tits seen at Great Yarmouth in February 1848, which seems to be the only evidence that the major 1847 irruption of this species at Heligoland may have affected the British Isles. Rivière (1930) gave examples of a few specimens of Continental Great, Blue and Coal Tits identified in Norfolk (some from light vessels) and of apparent immigrations of Long-tailed Tits. In Essex, Glegg (1929) stated that Great Tits had been recorded on light vessels in 1903 and 1910.

In south London, Power (1910) noted that Blue and Great Tits appeared in October, sometimes in considerable numbers, moving in a westerly direction, and suggested that they were probably Continental birds; Coal Tits were also seen (September and October) and much more rarely Long-tailed (October and November) and Marsh (October). Then, as is described in Homes (1957), unusual numbers of Coal Tits were observed moving through central areas of London in October 1930. In Kent, Harrison (1942) identified a Blue Tit of the Continental form in November 1929, and in late October 1947 he witnessed an influx of Great and Blue Tits on the coast of Thanet, finding Continentals of the latter species and also one Continental Coal Tit, the only other tit he met with there during the period (Harrison 1948). Walpole-Bond (1938) described an easterly passage of Blue Tits along the Sussex coast from September to early November, with smaller return movements west in March and early April. Ticehurst (1909) quoted reports of tits, probably Coal or Blue, on lightships in the Straits of Dover in autumn.

In the west of England there appears to be only the isolated record of a large flight of tits, chiefly Blue, in Devon in February 1872 (Pidsley 1891). In Wales, however, there is said to be a marked westerly movement of British Great Tits in late autumn in Pembrokeshire (Lockley, Ingram and Salmon 1949) and a Continental Blue Tit was identified in Radnorshire in late October 1939 (Bannerman 1953).

In view of the prevalence of Coal Tits in the Pennines in 1957, it is interesting that Oakes (1953) said that large numbers appear in October in some years in north and mid-Lancashire, indicating immigration on a widespread scale. He did not suggest that they were of Continental origin, but in an earlier work (Oakes and Battersby 1939) it was stated that a few of the Coal Tits which appeared in Lancashire in November had grey mantles. The species was exceptionally abundant there from October 1930 to mid-January 1931. Coal Tits were also particularly numerous near Heywood (Lancashire) in the winter of 1921-22 (Whittaker 1935).

Baxter and Rintoul (1953) described marked immigrations of Continental Great Tits in Scotland in the autumns of 1910, 1914 and 1932, with odd birds in other years. Continental Blue Tits are more rarely seen in Scotland (though a large influx including at least one Continental bird was reported in Shetland in 1932) and Continental Coal Tits have seldom been identified; these movements have been noted mainly in the northern islands. In Ireland Great Tits were reported from lightships on two occasions in October 1899, but there is no evidence of Blue Tit migration there, though odd birds have occurred at isolated stations (Kennedy, Ruttledge and Scroope 1954).

From these scattered records it is clearly impossible to compile any complete list of tit invasions in the British Isles. The years for which we have records of coastal movements where both Blue and Great Tits were involved are 1878, 1889, 1901, 1910, 1932 (Scotland only), 1947, and perhaps 1935 (Scotland). Great Tits only were noted in 1883, 1884, 1886 (Yorkshire) and 1914 (Scotland), and Blue Tits only in 1898, 1899, 1919, 1923 (Lincolnshire), 1926 (Scotland), and possibly 1929.* The Heligoland movements in 1847 may have affected this country; those of 1878 certainly did. These records depend mainly on the presence of interested observers on the coast at the right time, and are certainly incomplete, though it is also probable that the irruptions varied greatly in magnitude. Lt.-Col. W. M. Logan Home has kindly supplied details of attacks on paper in earlier years that were reported to him in connection with the 1949 enquiry (Home 1953), and they show that there were more than usual in 1925, 1934, 1938 and 1940. The figures are too small to be conclusive, but it is interesting that G. L. Charteris (*in litt.*) trapped very large numbers of Blue Tits in the winter of 1934-35.

To this list of probable invasion years must be added 1949, when there was a major irruption for which much fuller records are available, and 1954, when there was a more limited influx. By 1949, six coastal

*We have seen that, as in 1957, definite records of Continental races in any of these years were few, but it would now appear likely that most records of coastal movements on a large scale in the east or south do signify invasions.

observatories were in operation and their reports on the autumn movements (*Brit. Birds,* 43: 205-217) show that there was a considerable passage of Blue and Great Tits, with some Coal and Long-tailed, at Gibraltar Point; also smaller numbers of Blue Tits at Spurn and single ones at the Isle of May and Skokholm (which recorded also its first Great Tit and second Coal Tit). At Dungeness, M. L. R. Romer (*Brit. Birds,* 42: 386-387) gave evidence of the arrival of Blue, Great and Coal Tits from the Continent, and in central London a marked influx of tits, chiefly Blue but also Great and some Coal, Long-tailed and Marsh, was observed (*London Bird Report 1949:* 14-15). The great increase at this time in many inland areas was stressed by Logan Home (*op. cit.*).

In 1954, there was an influx of Great and Blue Tits with a few Coal, at Portland in October and early November, and Continental birds appeared to be involved (Ash 1956). No special movements of tits were, however, reported from observatories on the east and west coasts (Cornwallis 1955; Davis and Weaving 1955).

(*To be concluded*)

Studies of less familiar birds

104. Radde's Bush Warbler

By Irene Neufeldt

(Plates 13-18)

ON 5TH OCTOBER 1856 Gustav Radde found a leaf-warbler he had never met before near Lake Tarei Nor in eastern Transbaikalia. Later he named it *Sylvia* (*Phyllopneuste*) *schwarzi* in honour of his friend the astronomer Schwarz (Radde 1863). This was the bird that was to become known as Radde's Bush Warbler (*Phylloscopus schwarzi*). A detailed plumage description of the adult of this species is given in *The Handbook* and the main field characters are mentioned beneath the accompanying photographs (especially plate 13), so these need not be repeated here. The breeding range is confined to a narrow part of southern Siberia (from the Altai and Salair mountains in the west to Sakhalin Island in the east) and to north-eastern China and North Korea. It winters in southern China, Vietnam, Laos, Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. To western Europe it is a very rare vagrant that has been recorded only twice: in England near North Cotes, Lincolnshire, on 1st October 1898 (Caton Haigh 1898, Saunders 1899); and in Germany on Heligoland on 18th October 1930 (Drost 1931).

Detailed data on the breeding biology of this interesting warbler are absent from both the English and the Russian literature and only three authentic nests have previously been described—two from the Soviet Union (Shulpin 1928, Yamashina 1935) and one from Korea (Austin 1948). As Harber (1955) has written in reviewing Ptushenko (1954), "the eggs found by Smirnow and given doubtfully as belonging to this species in *The Handbook* were ascribed to it in error". The author was therefore very lucky to find two nests in 1958 and 1959 on the Zeya-Amur plateau in eastern Siberia. The short outline which follows is largely based on observations made at these nests and is intended to supplement the necessarily very sketchy account given in *The Handbook*.

On its way from its winter quarters in Indo-China Radde's Bush Warbler does not cross Central Asia, but migrates to the north over the middle and eastern parts of China to Manchuria. There the main route divides into two: some go a short distance to Ussuriland and Sakhalin Island, while others make the very long journey to the Altai mountains along the southern edge of Siberia. Because of the long way it has to come the species arrives in the western part of its breeding range very late, in the second half of June, but of course it reaches Amurland considerably earlier than it does the Altai and in 1959 the first arrivals were noted on the Zeya-Amur plateau on 17th May. They kept to dense swampy growths of pygmy birch (*Betula fruticosa*) and Radde's willow (*Salix Raddeana*), among bushes on river banks and along roadside ditches, the males singing casually as they searched for food. In the same habitats Dusky Warblers (*Ph. fuscatus*) and Yellow-breasted Buntings (*Emberiza aureola*) could also be seen. By 22nd May most of the Radde's Bush Warblers had moved on and the few that stayed to breed shifted from the swampy lowland to the foothills and the slopes above.

The typical breeding habitat of Radde's Bush Warbler on the Zeya-Amur plateau is in mixed forests on the lower hill slopes (plate 14). Usually such forests are rather sparse as a result of intensive felling and frequent fires. They are composed of medium-sized pines (*Pinus* spp.) with scattered Mongolian oaks (*Quercus mongolicus*) and black birches (*Betula dahurica*) on the lowest parts; a very few high old pines tower above the rest. Under the sparse tree cover there are dense and impassable thickets of stunted oaks and bushes of *Lespedeza bicolor* and *Rhododendron dahuricum*. Hazels, young birches and aspens seldom occur in these places. The grass beneath the trees is short but very thick. This kind of forest is not the only habitat of Radde's Bush Warbler in Amurland, however. At some distance from the Amur valley the mixed forests on north-eastern and northern slopes gradually change and the pines become replaced by Siberian larches (*Larix*

sibirica). Such sparse larch-oak forest with scattered birches and dense undergrowth of *Rhododendron, Lespedeza, Salix floderskii* and *Rosa acicularis* is also populated by this species.

Radde's Bush Warblers are not numerous on the Zeya-Amur plateau and in the breeding period it is not possible to hear more than two singing males from any one place. Consequently each pair has a large territory which tends to occupy a hill-slope all the way from the foot to the top. The male regularly visits every part of his territory, but he is never aggressive towards other species breeding in it. Siberian Rubythroats (*Luscinia calliope*), Gray's Grasshopper Warblers (*Locustella fasciolata*), Thick-billed Warblers (*Phragmaticola aëdon*) and Brown Shrikes (*Lanius cristatus confusus*) nest in the same thickets. Incidentally, the Thick-billed Warbler and the Brown Shrike are mocking birds and very often add parts of the Bush Warbler's songs to their own. The male Bush Warbler chooses a group of trees, or perhaps a single high one, where he can be seen constantly. Sitting on any protruding twig he sings all day long, though more intensively in the mornings. Now and again he stops and begins to search for insects, but he soon flies across to another high tree and goes on singing. Sometimes, at moments of great excitement, the male comes down from his high perch and, following the female, sings as he flies across from the top of one bush to another. By contrast, the female is very shy and silent. All the time she keeps among dense thickets and only very seldom ventures into even the low trees when searching for food for the nestlings. In fact, up to the time that these hatch it is almost impossible to locate her: only the very soft whistle she gives in response to the song of the male enables one to detect her presence.

The 1958 nest (plates 15a and 18b) was in the larch-oak habitat and the 1959 one (plates 13, 16, 17 and 18a) in the pine-oak forest. As with many other species of warblers, the hen alone did the building. The male sang near-by during that period and followed his mate when she was carrying nest material, but only very seldom did he approach her while she was picking up the material or busy with construction. The nests were large in proportion to the birds: in the two examined the outside diameter and depth were 170 and 176 mm. and 112 and 115 mm. respectively, while the diameter and depth of the cup were 70 mm. and approximately 60-68 mm. They were spherical with a side entrance like the nests of all *Phylloscopus* warblers: this entrance may evidently be located at the very centre or somewhat nearer to the top (compare plates 18a and 18b). The outside walls were built of dead stems and leaves of grasses picked up from the ground near-by. In the 1959 nest pieces and inner fibres of bark were also used (plates 13, 16, 17 and 18a). The outsides were very friable, but the insides,

built of short dry grass-blades and *Lespedeza* leaves, were much more compact. The cup of one nest was lined with feathers of the Hazel Hen (*Tetrastes bonasia*): Hazel Hens were very common in the area concerned and there were plenty of their feathers lying about as it was the moulting period for the males. The second nest, however, had no feathers in its lining. This one was built at a very low height, only 15 cm. (about 6 inches) above the ground, at the base of a *Rhododendron* bush. The first nest was on a small *Lespedeza* bush and at a height of 70 cm. (about 28 inches). Neither was attached to twigs or grasses.

Within a day of the structure being completed, the hen laid the first egg and in each case this was on 21st June. Thereafter eggs were laid at a rate of one a day until the full clutch of five or six (plate 15a) was complete. The measurements of the six eggs in one clutch were 17.5 × 14.0 mm. (two), 17.5 × 14.2 mm., 18.0 × 13.7 mm., and 18.0 × 14.0 mm. (two). All eggs were white with pale rusty-yellowish dots and spots. The ones found by Shulpin (1928) in Ussuriland, which are now in the collection of the Zoological Institute of the Academy of Sciences in Leningrad, are rather evenly marked with very tiny speckles and have some larger spots concentrated at the bigger end. Those shown in plate 15a also had very tiny markings, but the larger spots were few and spread regularly over the whole surface.

Incubation began with the laying of the last egg and it was found that the hen alone carried out this task. The male was not seen to feed his mate on the nest and she had to leave it and forage for herself. At one nest incubation lasted 13 days and the young hatched over a period of 24 hours. The skin of the newly hatched nestlings (plate 15b) was yellow-rose in colour and the greyish-white down was long (11-12 mm.) but sparse. The nestling is not described in *The Handbook* and so it should be added that the distribution of the down was inner supra-orbital, occipital and humeral. The inside of the mouth was yellow and there were no tongue spots. Hatching weights varied from 0.9 to 1.0 gm.

It was found that the male took no part in the care of the young. He sang near the nest, however, as at the very beginning of the breeding period and in this respect his behaviour was very similar to that of the male Chiffchaff (*Ph. collybita*). During the first few days the young needed to be brooded almost continuously; the hen left the nest very seldom and for short periods only. In the dense thickets of the foot-hills it is especially cold and damp in the early mornings, so that she had to remain on the nest for a long time. At first the hungry young would move about restlessly and then with necks stretched out and bills wide open they would eagerly begin to ask for food (plate 18a). When this happened the hen flew off to search for

PLATE 13. Radde's Bush Warbler (*Phylloscopus schwarzi*) at nest, Amurland, U.S.S.R., 13th July 1959. Bigger and longer-tailed than a Chiffchaff, it has a thick bill, long cream superciliary reaching nape and contrasting with dark eye-stripe, and pale brown mottling on cheeks and ear-coverts (pages 117-122) (*photo: Irene Neufeldt*)

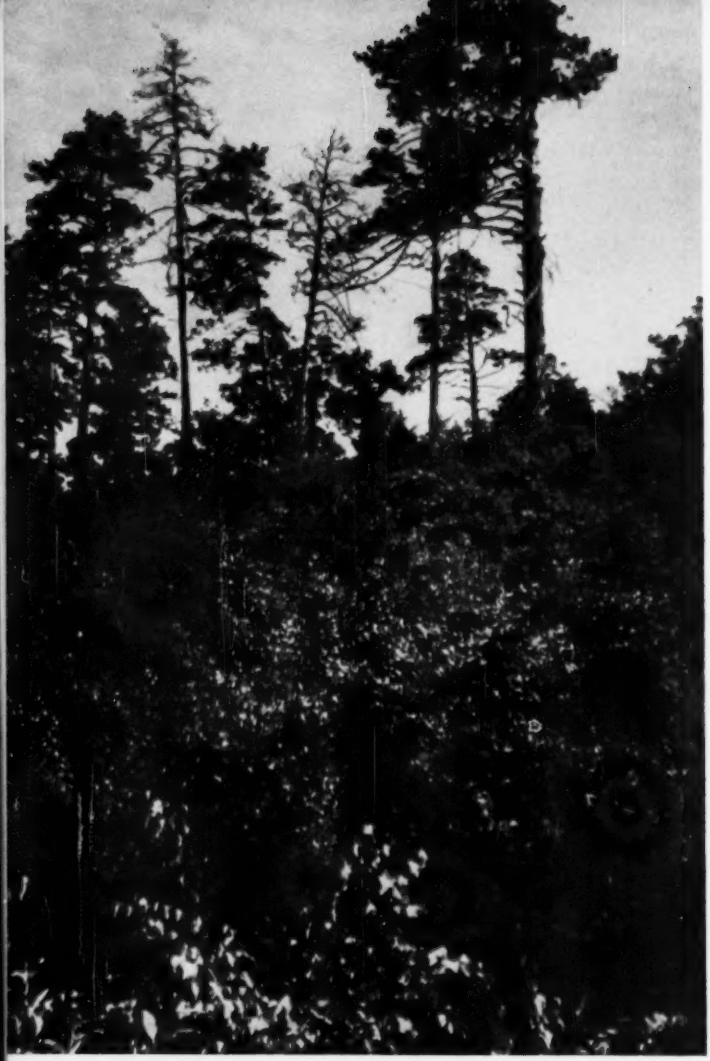


PLATE 14 (*above*). The habitat of Radde's Bush Warbler (*Phylloscopus schwarzi*) in Amurland, U.S.S.R., is on the lower hill slopes where open forests of pine or larch and oak have a dense undergrowth of *Lespedeza* and *Rhododendron* (page 118)

PLATE 15 (*right*). The nest has a side entrance and this one was loosely built of grass and lined with feathers (page 119); 5-6 white eggs with pale rusty-yellowish markings are laid. The blind newly-hatched nestling is yellow-rose in colour and has long but sparse greyish-white down (page 120) (*photos: Irene Neufeldt*)

PLATES 16 and 17. Sequence of female Radde's Bush Warbler (*Phylloscopus schwarzi*) bringing and giving food to the nestlings, and then waiting for and removing a faecal sac, U.S.S.R., July 1959 (plate 16b, below, was actually taken six days after the others, on the 20th, when the young were 10-11 days old). Note again the points

mentioned on plate 13, as well as the long and stout yellowish tarsus and, in plate 17a above, the contrast between pale brown upper mandible and yellowish-flesh lower. The diagnostic long 1st primary, twice as long as the coverts and half the length of the 2nd, shows on plate 17b (below) and plate 13 (*photos: Irene Neufeldt*)

PLATE 18. Above, female Radde's Bush Warbler (*Phylloscopus schwarzi*) with chicks one day old, U.S.S.R., 10th July 1959. Below, nestlings one week old, 16th July 1958. The upper nest was six inches off the ground in *Rhododendron*, while the lower was at a height of about 28 inches in *Lespedeza* (page 120) (*photo: Irene Neufeldt*)

PLATE 19. Rufous Warbler (*Agrobates galactotes*) at nest, Spain, June 1959. Not really a warbler at all (page 122), this bird is easily recognised by its reddish upper-parts and chestnut tail tipped with white and black, a feature not shown here. Note the cocked tail, rather thrush-like shape and heavy bill (*photo: Antonio Cano*)

PLATE 20. Above, typical stance of Rufous Warbler (*Agrobates galactotes*); the tail is continually fanned or jerked up and it is a slim bird with long legs and a whitish superciliary (*photo: Antonio Cano*). Below, hedge of prickly pear (*Opuntia*) where the large, rough and untidy nest is often found in S. Spain (*photo: Eric Hosking*)

insects near-by, but very often she came back without any as they are few on cold mornings. Left without warming the nestlings soon became flaccid and paid no attention to the return of their mother (plate 13).

The hen did not begin to feed the young until after the last one had hatched, which meant that the eldest received nothing until it was nearly 24 hours old. At first the food consisted of spiders, aphids, flies, mosquitoes, gad-flies, small caterpillars and moths, the last especially Tortricidae (plate 16b), but by the time they were a week old the nestlings were eating much larger insects including various Orthoptera and the caterpillars of some of the bigger moths. Faecal sacs were carried away from the nest by the female (plate 17b).

When only one day old the eyes of the nestlings began to slit (plate 18a) and this was very noticeable by the fourth day (plate 13). By this time the sheaths of the primaries began to show. The eyes of the young were fully open by the sixth or seventh day and then the tips of feathers started to emerge from their sheaths on the breast and afterwards on the back and neck (plate 18b). About this time the young birds became very timid. They no longer opened their mouths widely at any loud sound or the shaking of the nest or at the appearance of bird or human near-by. Instead they tried to hide in the back of the nest and frighten the enemy by snapping their bills.

The young left the nests on 22nd-24th July, at 13 or 14 days, still unable to fly. Their weight at this time was 11.3-12 gm. compared with the 13.2-15 gm. of the adult birds. Able to climb well on twigs and stems, they kept near the ground in bushes and grass. After two or three days they could fly short distances between trees and in a week the brood had moved a distance of 100-150 yards from the nest. The male Bush Warblers followed the broods, still singing but not so intensively and now often on low bushes and chiefly in the mornings. In 1959 the last song was heard on 8th August. In Amurland the autumn migration starts about 20th August and lasts until the beginning of October.

The juvenile plumage of this species differs from the spring and summer dress of the adult in its strong suffusion of sulphur-yellow below and olive-yellow above. The first-winter dress is similar to that of the freshly moulted adult except that the breast and lower throat are brownish and the belly is yellower.

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Photographs of Rufous Warbler by Antonio Cano

(Plates 19-20)

THE RUFOUS WARBLER (*Agrobates galactotes*) was one of the earliest species to appear in our photographic series, as long ago as 1947 (*Brit. Birds*, 40: 335-336 and plates 32-34). A fairly full text based on notes supplied by the photographer, A. Stubbs, was published at the same time and the reader is referred to that and to *The Handbook* for information about this bird. The points brought out by Antonio Cano's photographs, and also by the habitat photograph supplied by Eric Hosking, are mentioned in the captions beneath the plates and we leave these to speak for themselves. However, it is worth taking this opportunity of drawing attention to the fact that many authorities no longer regard this species (nor the Ethiopian genus *Erythropygia* with which it is now usually merged) as a true warbler. R. Meinertzhagen (*Bull. B.O.C.*, 69: 110) believes that the genus *Erythropygia* (including *Agrobates*) is "on the whole" better placed with the Old World warblers, but J. P. Chapin (*Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, 75A: 495) and other authors consider that it is more correctly assigned to the Turdinae. C. Vaurie in his *The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna* (pp. 354-356) calls the present species the Rufous Bush Robin and places it between the chats (*Oenanthe*, etc.) and the rock thrushes (*Monticola*).

I. J. F.-L.

Booted Warbler at Fair Isle: the problem of identification

By Peter Davis

A BOOTED WARBLER (*Hippolais caligata*) was caught by R. H. Dennis and J. Bazey in the gully trap at Fair Isle in the early morning of 29th August 1959. It was released at the observatory after examination and on the 31st was seen on a cliff near-by. The only other records in western Europe are from Heligoland on 28th September 1851 and from Fair Isle on 3rd September 1936.

The following description was taken from the bird in the hand:

Upper-parts, head, wing-coverts and upper tail-coverts: pale sandy grey-brown (without any olive tint), a little darker on the crown; a fairly distinct buffish-white superciliary, most obvious in front of the eye, and narrow orbital ring of the same colour. *Flight-feathers:* rather darker than upper-parts, with buff edgings to the outer webs; outermost tail-feathers with buff-white outer webs, and penultimate pair marked buff-white at the tips of the outer webs. *Under-parts and axillaries:* silvery-white, with a buff tinge on the flanks and across the breast. *Soft parts:* bill (slender for a *Hippolais*) with dark horn upper mandible, lower tipped same but very pale pinkish at base; inside of mouth daffodil yellow; legs pale brown with blue-grey overtone, as in the commoner *Hippolais* species; iris dark olive. *Measurements:* wing 62.5 mm., bill 15.5, tarsus 21, tail 53 (outer feathers 50); bill 3.5 mm. wide at base of nostrils. *Wing-formula:* 1st +8, 3rd and 4th longest, 2nd −6, 5th −1, 6th −3.5, 7th −5, 8th −8.5; 3rd to 5th emarginate, 6th slightly so; secondaries equal to 10th primary. *Weight:* 8.4 gm. at 06.30 G.M.T. The entire plumage (including body-feathers) appeared worn and faded; the tips of the longest primaries were slightly chipped, the tail more abraded.

The specimen presented a nice problem in identification, which would have been greater had we not recently received from Kenneth Williamson his "bird ringer's guide" to the rarer warblers (unpublished), which he had prepared after an examination of skins in the national collection at the British Museum (Natural History). One undated specimen of the closely similar eastern form of the Olivaceous Warbler (*H. pallida elaeica*) was available at Fair Isle for direct comparison; this had rather darker and greener upper-parts than our capture, no orbital ring and a broader bill. Only one person present, W. H. Tucker, had seen a live Olivaceous Warbler—the Portland bird of 1956—and he considered that that had been a good deal darker than the bird before us.

We had to consider not only the resemblance between the Booted Warbler and the various forms of the Olivaceous, but also apparent divergences of size and colour between our bird and the available

descriptions of *H. caligata*. The most detailed of these descriptions were of the typical form, to which the original western European specimens were referred. Both *The Handbook* (2: 68) and Wardlaw Ramsay (1923) state or imply that *H. c. caligata* has darker upper-parts than *H. p. elaeica*; Williamson's "guide" describes the upper-parts as grey-brown in worn dress, greyish-olive (1st-winter) or warm brownish-olive (adult) in new plumage. Our bird, like the Heligoland specimen described by Gätke (1895), was worn and faded, and this could account for its paleness. There is, however, a larger and paler eastern form of *H. caligata*, Sykes's Warbler (*H. c. rama*), to be taken into account; and, though it would be unwise to be dogmatic about the taxonomic position of an isolated specimen, the measurements of our bird seem more normal for a bird of the eastern form.

The following table compares the important measurements of the recent Fair Isle bird with those of the two main forms of *H. caligata*, of *H. p. elaeica* (the eastern form of the Olivaceous Warbler, on the British List) and of *H. p. opaca* (the larger and longer-billed western Mediterranean race). The typical form of *H. pallida* (Egypt) is not included for lack of detailed measurements; it is of similar size and structure to *H. p. elaeica*, but is paler and according to Wardlaw Ramsay has a long second primary like the eastern form.

TABLE I—MEASUREMENTS OF BOOTED WARBLER (*Hippolais caligata*) AND OLIVACEOUS WARBLER (*H. pallida*)

The figures used are a combination of those given in *The Handbook* (H) and in Kenneth Williamson's unpublished "guide" to the rarer warblers (W).

	Fair Isle bird	*H. c. caligata*	*H. c. rama*	*H. p. elaeica*	*H. p. opaca*
Wing	62.5	55-63	59-64	63-71	64-72
Tail	53	45-54	50-58	50-57	52-62
Bill (to skull)	15.5	11.5-15	14-16	(H) 12.5-14 (W) 14.5-16.5	17-19
Breadth of bill (at base of nostril)	3.5	(W) finer than *H. pallida*		(W) 4-4.5	(W) 5-5.5
1st primary..	+8	(H) +3-7 (W) +3-10 ("usually longer in *rama*")	(H) +5-9	+3-7.5	+6-8
2nd primary	=7-8th	=6-8th (usually 6-7th)	=7-9th (usually 7-8th)	=5-7th (occ. 7-8th)	=7-8th
Emargination	3rd-6th	3rd-5th (occ. 6th)	3rd-5th (often 6th)	3rd-5th	3rd-5th

It will be noted that, apart from wing-length, the dimensions of the bill and the slight emargination of the sixth primary in some *H. caligata* seem to be the only really diagnostic structural features, though the lengths of the first and second primaries will be corroborative in many specimens.

The typical Booted Warbler nests from the Moscow area eastward to West Siberia and south-eastward to the Caspian Sea and the southern Urals. Sykes's Warbler breeds from Transcaspia and Iran east to Sinkiang. There is a considerable area of intermediacy or hybridisation between the two forms, from the Kirghiz Steppes to western Mongolia. Both forms winter in India, mainly in the northern half of the sub-continent, but *H. c. rama* migrates to Southern Arabia also (Vaurie 1959).

On its release the Fair Isle bird flew to the cliff and settled beneath an overhanging tuft of grass. Even in the shadow it seemed a remarkably pale little warbler—the colour of weak milky tea—and when it moved into the light this was still the only feature that attracted the attention; the eye-stripe was inconspicuous and the colour seemed almost uniform from a distance of less than twenty yards. It disappeared from view, and was not rediscovered until two days later, in the cliffs of a neighbouring geo. Here it was watched for nearly an hour by R.H.D. and others. It spent the entire period restlessly hawking for flies—the prey included crane-flies (*Tipula* sp.)—or flitting about the rock-face and probing among the scattered clumps of vegetation. Though searched for later, it was not seen again.

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Obituary

Evelyn Vida Baxter (1878-1959)

MISS EVELYN VIDA BAXTER, LL.D. (Glas.), M.B.E., F.R.S.E., died at her home in Upper Largo, Fife, on 1st October 1959 and an era in Scottish ornithology was thus brought to a close—an era which began with the faunal studies of J. A. Harvie-Brown and culminated in the two-volume publication of *The Birds of Scotland* by Dr. Baxter and her life-long friend and close companion, Miss L. J. Rintoul.

It was a period of intensive work on distribution, status and migration, and Dr. Baxter and Miss Rintoul made a contribution to the study of birds in Scotland which will never be surpassed; their names have been household words with us for over half a century. It is impossible to write of one without introducing the other member of this indefatigable team.

Their first important contributions to ornithology began in 1907 with their earliest visits to the Isle of May where they went regularly to study migration up to 1935. In 1918 they published a valuable paper in *The Ibis* on the effect of wind on bird movements in which they stated that "the deviation from the direct route is largely, perhaps mainly, due to drift". At the time, these conclusions were directly at variance with the generally accepted views of the great Eagle Clarke.

In 1910 the two ladies took over the editing of the annual *Report on Scottish Ornithology*, which involved them in a vast correspondence with observers all over the country. This *Report* ceased when the results of all their painstaking work were included in the production in 1928 of *The Geographical Distribution and Status of Birds in Scotland*. After this, they wrote an annual paper on "Notes on the status of birds in Scotland" in *The Scottish Naturalist* until the advent of the Second World War in 1939, and in 1935 they published *A Vertebrate Fauna of Forth*. This was followed finally in 1953 with their great work on *The Birds of Scotland* which will remain a land-mark in Scottish ornithology and a fitting memorial to the joint authors.

In the spring of 1953 Dr. Baxter suffered the sad loss of Miss Rintoul, but took this blow with characteristic fortitude. In 1954 members of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club were delighted when she agreed to act as Convener of the Scottish Bird Records Committee, and she was responsible for the compilation of the annual reports of this Committee until her death. She was the first woman Vice-President of the British Ornithologists' Union and was awarded the Union's Gold Medal at the Centenary Celebrations in 1959.

Dr. Baxter was, with Miss Rintoul, a joint Founder President of the S.O.C. At the "Coming of Age" Dinner of the Club, in 1957, the members presented her with a clock inscribed "As a token of our affection and esteem"; and all present on that memorable occasion will remember the standing ovation which was accorded her. She took an active interest in the affairs of the Club right up to the end and we shall always cherish the memory of her sitting in her accustomed seat near the front of the hall at our meetings and lectures; when for the first time she was not there and we all stood in silence to mourn her passing, the sense of our loss was grievous.

Members of my own generation who benefited so much from her sympathetic encouragement and wisdom have felt her death acutely.

Well do I remember the advice she gave me as a small boy: "Never publish any record unless you are 100% certain of your identification; if you are found to have made an error, you are damned for life!" What better counsel could be given to the young?

In thinking of Evelyn Baxter, memories crowd thick and fast. When at the age of 76 she motored along from Largo to Cultsness, pulled on her gumboots and took barbed wire fences in her stride to see the first Wilson's Phalarope to be recorded in Europe, I remember her enjoyment and undisguised excitement; indeed I recall wondering which gave me more pleasure—watching the bird or her in action! Then there was the first occurrence in Scotland of the White-rumped Sandpiper: we sat for hours together on the mud at Gladhouse reservoir watching this small wader—she watching intently through her binoculars and dictating notes to me on the spot. She was a very remarkable old lady and we shall not see her like again. G.W.

Notes

Duration of dives of Black-necked Grebes.—*The Handbook* gives the recorded lengths of dives of Black-necked Grebes (*Podiceps nigricollis*) as ranging from 9 to 50 seconds and adds "but about 25-35 seems most usual". At King George VI Reservoir, Staines, Middlesex, on 15th September 1959, two different birds were each timed on six consecutive dives, these being spread over a period of 10-15 minutes. The respective figures were 55, 55, 52, 54, 57 and 50 seconds and 58, 59, 65, 68, 37 and 64 seconds. Thus only two of twelve dives were within the range given in *The Handbook*. The birds were not travelling across the reservoir and so it seems safe to assume that they were searching for food which must have been either far below the surface or very scarce. RICHARD CARDEN

Fulmar incubating eggs of Herring Gull.—With reference to Dr. J. Morton Boyd's note (*Brit. Birds*, 52: 163) about a Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) incubating the eggs of a Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*), I found a similar happening on Craigleith in the Firth of Forth on 9th June 1959. I saw a Fulmar sitting on what seemed to be a very large nest and, on climbing down and dislodging the bird, was surprised to find two Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*) eggs.

P. B. BROWN

Shelducks diving at a Marsh Harrier in unison.—On 15th June 1959, in Suffolk, I witnessed an attack by a pair of Shelducks (*Tadorna*

tadorna) on a Marsh Harrier; it seemed remarkable both for its duration and the method employed. A pair of Marsh Harriers were breeding in an extensive reed-bed and for fully an hour and a quarter the male was flying continuously to and fro over the area, often at a height of about a hundred feet. For almost the whole of this time it was being harassed by the Shelducks, both of which flew after it and now and then at it. Towards the end of the period I watched them, however, a different method was used. The Shelducks, flying close together, climbed well above the harrier which was itself at a fairly considerable height. They then turned and dived at it in unison. Their previous attacks had been avoided without apparent effort, but this time the harrier was forced to side-slip and drop many feet in the process. Such an action on the part of the Shelducks, which presumably had young in the vicinity, would seem to be very unusual and I have been unable to trace a similar occurrence. C. M. VEYSEY

Broken eggs in the nests of Sparrowhawk and Golden Eagle.— The frequent and mysterious breakage or disappearance of eggs in the eyries of Peregrines (*Falco peregrinus*) (*Brit. Birds*, 51: 23-26) is matched by similar happenings in the nests of Sparrowhawks (*Accipiter nisus*). Eight instances in 48 nests seen with eggs between 1943 and 1959 are set out below:

(1) *Great Orton, Cumberland.* May 1947. Empty nest with remains of eggs below.

(2) *Finglandrigg, Cumberland.* 26th May 1952. c/4 and remains of another egg below.

(3) *Fingland, Cumberland.* 2nd June 1953. Empty nest with remains of two eggs below.

(4) *Bethesda, Caernarvonshire.* 20th June 1954. 1 addled egg and one small young in nest, with remains of at least one more broken egg below.

(5) *Richmond, Yorkshire.* 5th June 1955. c/1 and remains of at least two more eggs below.

(6) *Raughtonhead, Cumberland.* 31st May 1958. c/3 and remains of another egg below.

(7) *Glasson, Cumberland.* 26th May 1959. c/2 and remains of at least another egg below.

(8) *Kirkbride, Cumberland.* 26th May 1959. c/3 and remains of at least another egg in the nest.

In most cases varying-sized fragments of shell were found on the ground below, but occasionally there were remains actually in the nest. These breakages had all occurred well before hatching time, and in each instance only pieces of shell were left, with no traces of the egg contents. Appearances suggested strongly that the cause of breakage was the same as in the Peregrine and I am inclined to believe that the eggs were eaten or otherwise destroyed by their owners. They had not been tipped overboard intact but had first been reduced to pieces

and the contents evidently removed. Only nests 1 and 3 were deserted; the sitting hen was flushed from all the others. Except in the case of nest 3, none of the trees appeared to have been climbed previously that season, and there was no evidence of other causes of breakage, such as egg-eating by Crows (*Corvus corone*), Jays (*Garrulus glandarius*) or squirrels (*Sciurus* spp.).

Breakages were more frequent during the latter half of the observation period, as was found for the Peregrine. It was during this time that a decline in the numbers of breeding Sparrowhawks, or at least the desertion of several once-regular territories, became apparent in the Carlisle district of Cumberland. Such desertions are difficult to prove and they may be unconnected with the breakage of eggs, but the territories of nests 2 and 3 appear to have been without breeding birds during the last few years. Moreover, two more pairs in the Fingland area and one near Great Orton do not seem to have nested since about 1954. In the same Solway district of Cumberland a wood at Kirkandrews-on-Eden which held two nesting pairs from 1943 to 1945 certainly had only pair from 1946 onwards, and during the last few years I have been unable to locate even one nest. Another Kirkandrews wood held a nest in 1949 and evidently during earlier years, but has been deserted since at least 1952. There are no gamekeepers in this district to account for the decline.

Mr. E. Blezard tells me that in Cumberland he has several times noted similar occurrences in the Sparrowhawk, with the remains of eggs either in the nest or on the ground below.

I have not found broken eggs in the nests of Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*), Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) or Merlin (*F. columbarius*), but there is one other raptor for which it is possible to give instances of similar happenings and that is the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaëtos*). Two eyries in Sutherland, one on 15th April 1952 and the other on 16th May 1957, contained the comminuted fragments of the season's eggs. In each case both the old eagles were about and there were no signs of human disturbance. The keeper at one eyrie was confident that no one had been to the place before during that season.

Dr. J. D. Lockie has kindly supplied me with notes on two other Golden Eagle eyries which contained broken eggs. At the first of these, in Perthshire in 1941, there were two eggs on 21st March and the old bird was incubating closely. On 20th April the nest contained one egg and the remains of the other; the adult was about and anxious. Then on 16th June the nest was found to be empty except for the remains of the second egg, and the old eagles were absent. There is just a possibility in this case that the first breakage could have been caused by falling icicles. Dr. Lockie's second record was in Wester Ross in 1957: on 3rd May there were two eggs and the adult was

incubating, but in July the nest contained nothing except the broken remains of both eggs, although one of the eagles was still in the area and interested in the eyrie.

On the Isle of Rhum, Inner Hebrides, Mr. P. Wormell found yet another instance of this happening at a Golden Eagle's eyrie and I am grateful to him for giving me details. On 15th April 1958 the nest contained two eggs and the adult was incubating, but on 4th June, though both adults were still in the area, nothing remained but small fragments of eggshell. Three pairs of Golden Eagles formerly nested on Rhum, but during the past three years breeding success has been low. No young were known to have been reared in 1958 and only one or two in 1959. This coincides with a reduction in the potential food supply, due to the removal of the large sheep stock, but there are no records of breeding success available for the years immediately before to give this real significance.

Since the publication of my article on the Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*), referred to above, I have noted at least one further case of egg-breakage in that species. On 20th April 1959 I visited an eyrie in Scotland and found one incubated egg and the broken remains of others. Another eyrie, also in Scotland, contained only one evidently incubated egg on 26th April 1959, but I did not reach the nest to examine it for remains of others. There has been no apparent decline in the breeding population of the Peregrine in the areas I have studied.

D. A. RATCLIFFE

Voice of the Jack Snipe.—In *The Handbook* (4: 206) the only note ascribed to the Jack Snipe (*Lymnocryptes minimus*), on the authority of T. A. Coward, is "a low, weak, but perfectly distinct call" occasionally uttered. In amplification of this my experiences may be of interest. From all the Jack Snipe I have come across I have only twice heard a call, on 18th November 1948 and 25th November 1959, each time in Co. Mayo. On both occasions it was a subdued version of the *scaap* of the Snipe (*Capella gallinago*), much lower and very abbreviated, and uttered once only.

ROBERT F. RUTTLEDGE

Bee-eaters diving into water.—In the early part of 1959 two European Bee-eaters (*Merops apiaster*) spent several weeks in the vicinity of a small dam near Bulawayo in Southern Rhodesia. On 7th March I was surprised to notice them hovering above the surface of the water and then diving in from a height of about six feet in the manner of a tern (*Sterna* sp.) or Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*). I could not see what they were catching, but they were doing this consistently and at times were almost completely submerged. On that day there were quite a few migrant European Bee-eaters in the area, but they did

not join these two and were feeding normally over the grassland. Later the two birds were back in their usual area and were not seen behaving in this way again. A. J. TREE

[We showed this note to Mr. J. J. Swift who has made a study of Bee-eaters in the Camargue, France. He has commented as follows: "I think that it would be unwise to assume without further evidence that the birds were in fact feeding, but their behaviour is of some interest and I know of only two similar records. Two of the young Bee-eaters reared in Sussex in 1955 were observed making shallow dives into a fresh-water pool (submerging only the head and neck) and once it seemed that one emerged with a white larva-like object in its bill (see K. E. I. Barham, P. J. Conder and I. J. Ferguson-Lees, 'Bee-eaters nesting in Britain, 1955', *Bird Notes*, 27: 40). I also have an observation by M. Richards of a Bee-eater 'fishing' in the Rixxanese in S. Corsica in a manner almost exactly the same as that described by Mr. Tree; nothing could be seen in the bird's bill. I have never observed such behaviour in the Camargue, but most of the birds that I watched had only brackish water in the vicinity and this might make a difference. Bee-eaters drink fresh water fairly often, hovering or dipping down to the surface. It seems that they occasionally bathe by immersing themselves completely in water, and it is not impossible that the observations above refer to birds bathing, although this would seem unlikely from the fact that they continued to dive a number of times."—EDS.]

Nuthatch seeming to feign dead after fight.—At 9 a.m. on 16th October 1959 two Nuthatches (*Sitta europaea*) that had come for nuts in a hanging basket at my home at Claygate, Surrey, suddenly started fighting on the lawn underneath. After two or three jumping skirmishes accompanied by a fierce squeaking, one of them fell on to its back with its claws and beak pointing upward and seemed to be feigning dead. The other watched, still, for a few seconds, then moved sideways about a foot. As this bird moved, the vanquished one "bicycle-pedalled" with its feet, but stopped when the victor stopped and again seemed to be feigning dead. The bicycle-pedalling was repeated once more, then the victor flew off. The vanquished "rose from the dead" very promptly indeed and made for the nut basket. The general effect was of an accomplished and polished performance. R. G. C. JENKINS

Robins feeding nestling Blackbirds.—During March 1959 a Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) made repeated attempts to build a nest inside our first-floor flat at Reigate, Surrey. We finally allowed it to do so on

an electric fire attached to the wall above the window of the kitchen. Three eggs were laid and then, over a week later, two more; two eggs hatched. The hen was cautious about coming in to feed the young when we were in the kitchen (it was often necessary for us to hide) and the cock was extremely shy.

Shortly after the Robins hatched, a brood of Blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) also hatched in a nest built against the outside wall of the kitchen just below the window. We were soon struck by the long intervals between the visits of the Robins to their nest and we discovered that the cock was feeding the young Blackbirds; to the best of our knowledge he never fed his own offspring. At the same time, if we frightened the hen Robin she would also sometimes dispose of the food she was carrying at the Blackbirds' nest. As a result there was at least one period of several hours when the young Robins were not visited (so we fed them on chopped earthworms).

The hen Robin's normal route to her own nest was very close to the Blackbirds' and at times she appeared to be bewildered. On one occasion she stood on the edge of the Blackbirds' nest with food and then, getting no response from the young, flew up to feed her own. Both parent Blackbirds accepted the presence of a Robin at the nest and on at least two occasions an adult Blackbird and Robin stood side by side. The male Robin carried out much of the sanitation at the nest of the larger birds.

The two young Robins and all five Blackbirds fledged, but it was not possible to follow the association afterwards.

RAYMOND and JOY CORDERO

Unusual roosting site of Pied Wagtails.—On 3rd September 1959 a large roost of Pied Wagtails (*Motacilla alba*) was found inside greenhouses used for growing tomatoes at Milton near Cambridge. The birds entered through the open windows in the roof and roosted on the guiding wires and on the tomato plants themselves at a height of eight to fourteen feet. The owners of the greenhouses said that the birds were usually present in large numbers from July until early November, and again in smaller numbers in the spring. The practice apparently first began about five years ago and much damage is caused by the birds' fouling the plants, particularly in the spring when these are small, and also the fruit.

During the seven weeks following our first visit to the roost, six excursions were made there at night and 453 Pied Wagtails were ringed. Of these, 244 were adult and 209 first-winter, but of the last 83, caught on 22nd and 24th October, 39 were adult (21 males and 18 females) and 44 were first-winter (25 males and 19 females). There were also 21 retraps of birds ringed at another Cambridge roost in the previous

two winters. It was estimated that between 600 and 800 wagtails were present during September 1959, and after that numbers gradually declined to 50 at the end of October, when the roost finally dispersed because of the removal of the plants and the closing of the windows. These peak figures are supported by the numbers of retraps: for example, on 27th September, when 268 birds had already been ringed, only 25% of a catch of 186 had rings on.

It is interesting to note that when the wagtails abandon the greenhouse roost they disperse to several smaller roosts in more typical reed-bed sites and it was at one of these that the birds from the previous two winters had been ringed. Similarly, a large proportion of those caught in November 1959 at this roost, which is 4 miles S.E. of the greenhouses, had been ringed in the greenhouses in September and October. Some indication of the size of the area from which the large September roost draws its members may be given by the fact that one wagtail was recovered seven miles away the day after it was ringed. In addition, towards the end of 1959, wagtails with rings on were reported following the plough on farms as far as nine miles away from Milton. Evidence that even passage birds join the roost inside the greenhouses is provided by one ringed on 7th September 1959 and recovered on 26th October in southern Spain.

Finally, seven of the birds ringed at the reed-bed roost in the winter of 1957-58 were found dead together in the Milton greenhouses during cold weather on 16th February 1958, at the same time as many unringed ones. They had apparently entered for warmth during severe weather and had either been unable to get out or been too weak to do so. This use of the greenhouses at that time of the year is apparently quite exceptional.

C. D. T. MINTON

Reviews

The Waterfowl of the World. By Jean Delacour. Illustrated by Peter Scott. Vol. 3. Country Life, London, 1959. 270 pages; 20 colour plates; 46 distribution maps. £6 6s.

With this third volume *The Waterfowl of the World* becomes a completed work. It is open to plenty of criticisms, but when these have been made the fact remains that it has few rivals in surveying a major group of birds on a world scale on the basis of personal knowledge in so many lands. Although the colour reproduction can be rated as no higher than adequate, the illustrations are probably unique in comprehensiveness both as regards species and subspecies and in adult and juvenile plumages. Moreover, the pictures are arranged and presented with exceptional skill and are painted with all the talent which

is naturally expected of the world's leading artist in this field. The systematics are authoritative and up-to-date, and the avicultural information is not only thorough but based on unrivalled first-hand experience. The descriptions are sufficient, if somewhat brief, and the distribution sections are serviceable although it is not easy to construe the maps in relation to the text.

The present volume deals with five somewhat arbitrary "tribes" of this puzzling and close-knit group—the eiders; the pochards; the perching ducks (including Mandarin, Comb and Muscovy Ducks, and Spur-winged Goose); the scoters, goldeneyes and mergansers; and finally the stifftails. One species, the Labrador Duck, is definitely extinct and another, the Auckland Island Merganser, is feared to be. The Brazilian Merganser, whose continued existence was for some time in doubt, is extensively described on the basis of studies made since its rediscovery in 1948. The Carolina or Wood Duck of North America has revived excellently under strict protection, but it is still questionable whether the Mandarin Duck can survive in its Asiatic haunts and therefore the recently acclimatised stock in Surrey and Berkshire is of peculiar importance.

The present volume is of special interest to readers in Britain for its accounts of such rare stragglers to this country as the Ring-necked Duck (included with the Tufted Duck among "broad-billed pochards") and the King and Steller's Eiders, Surf Scoter, Buffelhead, Hooded Merganser and Harlequin.

It will no doubt be a long time before the ornithologists of the world are provided with an equivalent survey of any other cosmopolitan group, and they must be grateful for a great labour of love worthily conceived and satisfactorily completed. E.M.N.

British Birds of Prey. By W. Kenneth Richmond. Lutterworth, London, 1959. 184 pages; 34 photographic plates. 21s.

This book, illustrated by photographs taken mainly by the author, opens with two general chapters which are then followed by separate ones on the Golden Eagle, Peregrine, Kestrel, Hobby, Merlin, Common Buzzard, Hen Harrier, Montagu's Harrier, Marsh Harrier, Goshawk, Sparrowhawk, Kite, Honey Buzzard and Osprey. It does not contain an index or a bibliography, and a number of often dogmatic pronouncements are so drafted as to make it impossible to distinguish statements based on the author's own fairly considerable experience from those simply rehashed, usually without acknowledgement, from other published sources. For example, the comprehensive review of the status and numbers of birds of prey published in *British Birds* in 1957 (50: 129-155) is in places even quoted verbatim without

the reader being given any definite clue to its existence. The author can have only himself to blame if critical readers conclude that he has no first-hand contribution to make to the problem of national trends in numbers, with which his book is so largely concerned. Nor can he object if they assume that, where his estimates differ from those of others, they are arrived at mainly by the bewildering processes of often contradictory and highly subjective argument which the author presents in half-digested form before suddenly plumping for one arbitrary conclusion or another.

Mingled uneasily with this stream of controversial generalisation, and with a number of hardly relevant rhetorical interludes, there is fortunately a considerable amount of first-hand observation. This is vividly described and will make many readers all the more regretful that the author's initial argument with himself about his aims (which he most candidly describes in his Introduction) should have ended in such a muddle. While he has produced a few new points and stimulating questions, this effort cannot be judged a success. It can only be hoped that, if he ever repeats the experience that in "putting pen to paper, I found myself in two minds", he will firmly decide what he is about before proceeding one word further. Meanwhile he may console himself that he is by no means the first to fail in this way, although few have been so open in admitting it.

In concluding his final essay on the Osprey, he writes:

> "Given a sporting chance, there is no doubt that the bird would return to more than one of the remoter lochs. It should not be beyond the wit of man—or beyond the means already at the disposal of the Nature Conservancy, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club—to provide that chance."

In view of events since this book went to press we may perhaps be forgiven for commenting, "It shouldn't and it wasn't". E.M.N.

Letters

The spread of the Eider in America

Sirs,—The increase and spread of the Eider (*Somateria mollissima*) in the British Isles, recently outlined by J. H. Taverner (*Brit. Birds*, 52: 245-258), is concurrent with a similar or greater increase in both summer and winter on the New England coast of America. In 1904, according to R. S. Palmer (1949, *Maine Birds*, p. 120), "only four adults at Old Man Island . . . and a few elsewhere were known of in the state. In the summer of 1931, Norton and Allen found 25 broods and 27 nests along the eastern coast, and by 1943 Gross had found nests

on 31 islands and estimated that the nesting population (of Maine) probably exceeded 2,000 pairs." Since then the increase in Penobscot Bay has been phenomenal. For instance, in 1943 A. O. Gross found 15 nests on No Man's Land in the Matinicus Archipelago which lies off this bay (*Wilson Bull.*, 56: 24). Fourteen years later, on 2nd July 1957, I found over 100 nests on that island. I believe that the increase elsewhere in the Penobscot Bay area has been proportional. At the same time at Muscongus Bay, which is much more thoroughly covered than Penobscot Bay, Joseph M. Cadbury reports that the summering population has increased from 800-1,000 ten years ago to something between 6,000 and 10,000 in 1959.

The winter increase has been even greater in proportion. L. Griscom and D. P. Snyder (1955, *Birds of Massachusetts*, p. 59) reported that the main wintering flock off Monomay on Cape Cod had risen "from 15,000 in 1940 to an estimated half-million in 1951, decreasing after the tanker disasters of February 1952."

FREDERICK V. HEBARD

Palearctic waders in eastern North America

Sirs,—I. C. T. Nisbet's recent article (*Brit. Birds*, 52: 205-215) on North American wader migration contained several stimulating ideas. However, one comment on the status of Palearctic waders in America requires, I feel, some qualification. He writes (pp. 211-212) that "the regular occurrence of the Ruff and not infrequent occurrence of the Lapwing, Curlew Sandpiper and European Woodcock in autumn in eastern North America combine with records of the European Curlew (2), Bar-tailed Godwit (3), European Snipe (several) and Jack Snipe to lay emphasis on species with extensive east-west migrations in Europe." On the basis of current data, published and unpublished, only two Palearctic waders can be considered of "not infrequent occurrence" on the Atlantic coast of North America: the Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris testacea*) and the Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*).

So far as records of the other mentioned species are concerned, they are so many years apart that the birds seem properly in the "accidental" class, to which they are assigned by the latest A.O.U. Check-list (1957). In over a century of ornithological activity a number of scattered records of Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) and of European Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) have accumulated, but the latest Lapwing record for the United States was almost twenty years ago, and the last *Scolopax* recorded is even older, except for one bird reported from New Jersey in December 1955 and January 1956 (Cruickshank 1956: 95; Potter and Murray 1956: 240). There seem to be five well-authenticated occurrences of the Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) in eastern

North America, two specimens from Massachusetts (Griscom and Snyder 1955: 111), one from New York (Muller 1947: 326), and two sight observations from New Jersey (Fables 1955: 35); but only one of these occurrences was within the past ten years—a bird seen in New Jersey in August 1951 by many observers (including the undersigned). The A.O.U. Check-list includes no record of either the European Snipe (*Capella g. gallinago*) or Jack Snipe (*Lymnocryptes minimus*) from eastern United States (and I know of none); a specimen of each is recorded from Labrador and one of the former from Bermuda. If any European waders (besides the Curlew Sandpiper and the Ruff) are of "not infrequent occurrence" in eastern North America, the evidence is yet to be produced. Considering the ardour with which numbers of "birders" in Massachusetts, New York and New Jersey have searched for rarities during migration for the past forty years, such overlooked waders would have to be birds that very closely resemble their American allies or that favour habitats not regularly worked by bird spotters.

The American status of the Curlew Sandpiper and the Ruff appears to have changed in recent years. Formerly even these species were regarded as casual, and the A.O.U. Check-list (1957), being based on the earlier literature, still so characterises them. In New York, on western Long Island (within the New York City limits), a site was discovered in 1947 where one to three Curlew Sandpipers appeared every year during the latter part of May. Even before 1947, this species had been noted with increasing frequency on Long Island (Cruickshank 1942). Within the past fifteen years observations have accumulated in other localities along the Atlantic coast, particularly in spring, much less often in autumn. The Curlew Sandpiper is now regarded as so regular in spring near New York City (Bull 1958), that, although elsewhere considered a rarity, it is no longer emphasized in bold-faced type when reported from this area in *Audubon Field Notes* (1958: 468). The Ruff, for the past ten years, has probably been recorded annually from somewhere in the Atlantic states between Massachusetts and Florida. As it favours fresh water it is more often seen away from the sea-coast than is the Curlew Sandpiper. The recent records are mainly in the spring. Curiously, there are a number of records (Griscom and Snyder 1955) of both species between late June and early August, and a few for the Curlew Sandpiper in winter (Cruickshank 1942; Fables 1955). The greater frequency of spring over autumn reports is contrary to what occurs with other rare waders (except perhaps for southern vagrants). Hence the plausible explanation that these two species may be more readily overlooked in their inconspicuous autumnal dress seems an inadequate explanation if these birds were really more numerous in the United States in autumn—

as one would expect if they were drifted over directly from Europe across the northern Atlantic.

The assumption is reasonable that Palearctic waders noted in America during the spring migration probably crossed the Atlantic during the previous autumn (or that of a prior year) and are returning northward with native waders. Nisbet makes the further stimulating suggestion (p. 213) that the earlier crossing may have been "perhaps between South America and Africa". This is an idea worth developing. I would suggest that a crossing of the *tropical* Atlantic may account not only for Palearctic spring migrants but also for many of those observed in north-eastern North America in late summer and autumn. The prevailing autumnal wind pattern across the northern Atlantic is strongly from west to east, i.e., adverse to a crossing directly from Europe to North America. Over the tropical Atlantic a very different situation prevails. South of the Equator (at times moving as much as ten degrees northward) is the zone of south-east trade winds, which "blow briskly and regularly . . . from June to January" (Murphy 1936: 42, 56). North of the Equator the tropical Atlantic between July and October is the breeding ground of great cyclones, which often attain hurricane velocity. A common course of these tropical cyclones is from near the coast of Africa westwards towards the West Indies, then often curving northward and north-eastward along or near the North American coast (Murphy 1936: 51-59). Murphy (1936: 56) figures the courses of a number of these storms which carried petrels from the eastern tropical Atlantic to north-eastern United States and Canada.

These tropical air movements occur during the period when Palearctic birds are migrating southward to Africa. The eastern islands of the West Indies are, of course, most likely to catch such drifted Palearctic waifs, but those cyclones that continue northward may deposit birds not only in the eastern United States, but also in Bermuda, Newfoundland or southern Labrador. Newfoundland and Labrador extend well east toward Europe, so Palearctic birds traversing the northern Atlantic are also most likely to occur there, as happened when numbers of Lapwings were carried over from Britain by an easterly winter storm in December 1927 (Witherby, 1928). But it should be noted that this section of eastern Canada is also in the path of some of the tropical storms, which in their later stages curve north-eastward. Newfoundland has in recent years reported a number of southern vagrants, including the Old World Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)—recorded elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere only from Trinidad.

Unequivocal as to the importance of tropical storms in transporting Palearctic migrants to American shores is the remarkable number of species collected on Barbados, easternmost of the Lesser Antilles

(about 13° N., 60° W.), and much nearer to Africa than to Europe. On this small member of the Windward Islands group, endowed with few bird students, Bond reports (1956, 1959) the collection of the following Palearctic species: Ringed Plover (*Charadrius h. hiaticula*) (September, only American record south of Baffin Island), Lapwing (once), Curlew Sandpiper (once, autumn), Ruff (many times, August to October), Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*) (only American record east of Alaska), Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) (November), European Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) (autumn, only American record), Alpine Swift (*Apus melba*) (September 1955, only American record). The last bird was attributed by the collector to a specific hurricane (Bond 1959, p. 11).

Of the waders, both Ruff and Curlew Sandpiper have been recorded from at least two other Lesser Antilles, and on the continent of South America, and the Curlew Sandpiper (recently) in Louisiana and Texas on the Gulf of Mexico. In the New World these two species associate with American waders of similar habitat. If the waders they join are still migrating southward, they will presumably accompany them, and return with them in the spring through North America. Once in the New World, Palearctic waders, so long as they survive, probably continue to migrate year after year with their American relatives. Birds carried north by late autumnal storms, after American waders have ceased migrating at such latitudes, are more likely to remain or to wander locally in search of suitable habitat. This may account for the occasional winter records of Palearctic waders when there have been no easterly storms.

EUGENE EISENMANN

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[In connection with the interesting list of European species mentioned by Mr. Eisenmann as having been recorded on Barbados, it may be useful to draw attention to the Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*) which was caught alive and killed in October 1956 on the French part of St. Martin in the Lesser Antilles (K. H. Voous, *Ardea*, 45: 89-90). This is the only record of this species in America.—EDS.]

Requests for information

Irruption of tits in 1959.—There is evidence that another irruption of tits (*Parus* spp.) took place during the autumn of 1959, though clearly on a much smaller scale than in 1957. Information is required on any increases or movements of tits (including the numbers involved and, if possible, times and directions) and also on outbreaks of attacks on milk-bottles, paper or putty. The report on the 1957-58 irruption, the second part of which is published in this issue on pages 99-117, suggests that inland movements were often overlooked or not reported, but such records are of special interest. We assume that most relevant observations for 1959 will by now have been sent to the editors of the appropriate county reports, but in the cases of areas without a local report, or where the observations are of a special nature, we should be most grateful if readers would get in touch direct with Stanley Cramp, 9 Queen Court, London, W.C.1.

Grey Wagtail movements.—Full details of coastal and inland movements of Grey Wagtails (*Motacilla cinerea*) are required for an intended analysis of the migrations of this species. Special attention is being given to the years 1956-60, but all observations are of interest and will be duly acknowledged in the event of publication. Details should be sent to J. T. R. Sharrock, Ecology Research Laboratory, Botany Department, University of Southampton.

Field investigations of the B.T.O.

Lapwing habitats.—This spring a new enquiry is to be launched by the British Trust for Ornithology into the habitat preferences of the Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*). This is designed as a follow-up to the previous Trust enquiry on this subject, which was organised in 1937 by E. M. Nicholson (*Brit. Birds*, 32: 170-191, 207-229, 255-271). It aims to find out whether the Lapwing's habitat preferences have altered in the last 20 years and, if so, why. It also seeks information on changes in status, flocking behaviour, etc. Forms and further details may be obtained from the organiser, M. D. Lister, 40 Nork Way, Banstead, Surrey.

Recent reports and news

By Kenneth Williamson and I. J. Ferguson-Lees

The items here are largely unchecked reports, and must not be regarded as authenticated records. They are selected, on the present writers' judgement alone, from sources generally found to be reliable. Observers' names are usually omitted for reasons of space and in case a report is subsequently rejected, and none of the items will be mentioned in our annual Index. Readers are asked to submit anything of interest as quickly as possible.

This summary is largely confined to November and December 1959. Most of the rarer birds in that period have already been mentioned (*Brit. Birds*, 52: 436-437, 439-440; 53: 41-48, 96) and we are now merely attempting to gather together some loose threads remaining from the last weeks of a very interesting autumn departure and winter arrival.

WAXWINGS

The now perennial subject of Waxwings (*Bombycilla garrulus*) must be left to the analysis being prepared by R. K. Cornwallis. We should be grateful if all records could be sent to him at Bleasby Grange, Legsby, Market Rasen, Lincolnshire. Here, to follow what we wrote in January (p. 47), it will suffice to say that, though the flocks were certainly very large in November, particularly in Scotland and on the east coast, many of them did not stay long, presumably because of the berry shortage. Only comparatively small numbers remained in the north-east after the beginning of December and there was a further exodus in early January. There were little groups in Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire from November to early January and odd records during this period in inland counties further south, such as Derby and Nottingham. Reports since then, however, have dropped away and there have been few from the extreme south of England west of Kent. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note in conclusion that Waxwings were seen travelling westwards in some areas during the remarkable hard-weather movement in mid-January (peak 13th-14th) which we hope to describe in another issue. For example, about 45 flew inland at Titchfield Haven (Hampshire) at this time.

LITTLE AUKS AND INLAND PETRELS

Little Auks (*Plautus alle*) appeared off the Norfolk coast during a gale on 26th-27th October, and on the days which followed many were seen off Hartlepool (Co. Durham)—including about 70 on the 29th, over 120 on the 30th, 21 on the 31st and 88 on 1st November. Most of these were travelling north and there was a similar northward movement past Spurn Head (Yorkshire) on 31st October in a return of anticyclonic weather: about 60 were recorded then and a dozen next day. Reports came from various other parts of the coasts of Yorkshire, Co. Durham and Northumberland and the peak movement seems to have taken place in that area, though smaller numbers were noted as far north and south as Midlothian and East Anglia (and there were odd ones on the south coast, chiefly Sussex, during 29th October-1st November). At Monks' House (Northumberland) 20 were feeding from a travelling shoal of sand-eels.

A number of Little Auks were found stranded at the turn of the month. Some were inland, but what was in no sense a "wreck" appears to have been due to the coincidence of the movement with the biggest diurnal Passerine immigration of the autumn. It seems likely that those which came to grief were "caught up" in low-flying flocks of immigrant Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*)—and, indeed, Little Auks were actually seen to fly inland with these strange companions at both Spurn and Hornsea (Yorkshire), the latter being another place where the northward movement was

striking on 31st October (51) and 1st November (47). Several dead or stranded birds were found in Norfolk and Lincolnshire between 31st October and 4th November. Much further inland, at Risley (Derbyshire), one was picked up alive on 2nd November. The only reports received from the west around this period concerned single birds at Oldham (Lancashire) on 16th October, Wirral (Cheshire) on 29th October and Kentmere (Lancashire) on 5th November, though one was picked up dead at Crosthwaite (Westmorland) at the end of December.

Perhaps similarly "caught up" by other birds, a few petrels were also recorded inland in early November. Two or three Storm Petrels (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) were seen flying up the Thames with Passerines at Cliffe (Kent) on 1st November, on which day one Storm Petrel and a Little Auk were found on Staines Reservoir (Middlesex) and a Leach's Petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorrhoa*) on Queen Mary Reservoir (Middlesex).

There was evidence of a reverse passage of Little Auks off north-east England in mid-November and again at the end of the month. At Hartlepool, for example, four were seen moving south on the 14th, 11 on the 15th and four on the 29th. More records from the south coast resulted: single birds at Selsey (Sussex) on the 14th, at Poole (Dorset) on the 15th, at Swingfield (Kent) on the 16th, at Brighton (Sussex) on the 18th, at St. Catherine's (Isle of Wight) on the 21st and at Southwick (Sussex) from the 22nd until 5th December. In December there were three at Selsey on the 6th in a south-south-westerly gale, and single birds in the Isle of Wight at Yarmouth (9th), Newton (28th) and Freshwater Bay (30th).

LITTLE GULLS AND PHALAROPES

Late October saw up to 30 Little Gulls (*Larus minutus*) daily in the Cley/Blakeney area (Norfolk) and an equally remarkable total at Hartlepool (Co. Durham) where 16 on the 27th-28th increased to 35 on the 29th when an anticyclonic ridge superseded the depression. Subsequently there were a number along the south coast from Sheppey (Kent) to Swanage and Portland Bill (Dorset). There would be little point in detailing all the records, but among the most interesting were 11-14 at Hartlepool on 14th November and 4 there on the 15th; 13 flying east-to-west past Selsey Bill (Sussex) during a S.S.W. gale on 6th December; 20 at Portland on the 8th; small feeding parties totalling 15 birds at Sheppey on the 12th; and an adult with a marked rosy tinge on the underparts, plus 3 immatures, off the Filey-Bridlington coast of Yorkshire on the 13th. Inland appearances included two young birds at King George V Reservoir (Essex) on 14th-15th November and an adult at Staines (Middlesex) the same weekend; an adult and an immature at the first locality from the 21st to the end of the month; and an adult at Ravensthorpe Reservoir (Northamptonshire) on 12th December.

An adult Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*) flew east past Selsey Bill (Sussex) on 2nd November and Grey Phalaropes (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) continued to be reported during November. It will be remembered that considerable numbers of the latter, including an incredible concentration at St. Agnes (Isles of Scilly), occurred during October (*Brit. Birds*, 52: 438-439) and there was a trickle of records during November. These were mostly single birds, in Kent, Sussex, Somerset and Glamorgan, but two were recorded together at Great Saltee (Co. Wexford) on the 12th.

BEWICK'S SWANS AND VARIOUS DUCKS

There would appear to have been at least two influxes of Bewick's Swans (*Cygnus columbianus bewickii*) before the turn of the year, one at the end of October and the other in mid-December, both rather earlier than has been usual in recent years (see *Brit. Birds*, 52: 393-416). Late October/early November reports from Berkshire,

Leicestershire (29 adults and 17 immatures) and Cheshire have already been mentioned (*Brit. Birds*, 52: 437); and that the date of the first influx was 31st October is supported by an observation of 11 coming in off the sea at Minsmere (Suffolk) that afternoon, followed by three next day. On 2nd November one was seen at Folkestone (Kent) and on the 4th one flew over Regent's Park (London). There were two at Woodhouse Mill (Yorkshire) on the 8th, and two adults and four young at Durleigh Reservoir (Somerset) on the 15th-16th. Ravensthorpe Reservoir (Northamptonshire) had two adults and two young from 21st November and these were joined by a further ten adults and six immatures on 12th December. This seemed to represent a second influx as on the 13th there were 8 at Chapel St. Leonards (Lincolnshire) and four flew over the Nene Washes, while 27 (17 adults and 10 young) were seen in the Hams Hall/Shustoke area (Warwickshire). Two days earlier, too, five were found at Bittell (Worcestershire), of which two remained to at least the 15th. Now birds began to be recorded more on the Ouse Washes and the occurrence of four adults and six young near Hereford on 26th December should perhaps also be mentioned. In the second week of January, and more particularly in the middle of the month, fair-sized herds were recorded from a number of counties.

There was a scattering of Red-crested Pochards (*Netta rufina*) in Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire and Glamorgan between late October and the end of the year, and a number of inland records of sea-ducks. These included several Long-tailed Ducks (*Clangula hyemalis*) and two interesting instances of Eiders (*Somateria mollissima*)—an immature male at Ravensthorpe Reservoir (Northamptonshire) on 21st November and an immature male and a female at Cannock Reservoir (Staffordshire) from 12th December to at least 10th January. However, the duck most widely commented on was the Goosander (*Mergus merganser*). Unfortunately we have not enough figures to make a complete picture or even to make it worth detailing the larger totals and more unusual records. However, it does seem clear that there was a considerable influx in the Midlands and the Home Counties during 9th-12th December, and again towards the end of the month and in mid-January. Surrey, Middlesex, Hertfordshire and from there up to Staffordshire and Leicestershire provide the limits of the counties most affected. There were big numbers on some of the London reservoirs—for example, 150 on Queen Mary Reservoir (Middlesex) on 9th December and over 235 there by the 28th—but such totals do occur there from time to time and the influx is shown up more clearly by records like the 42 and 49 at Wilstone Reservoir, Tring (Hertfordshire), on 13th December and 10th January respectively. These figures are quite exceptional for Tring. In the West Midlands the species was described as widespread in December.

PIGEON MOVEMENTS

An extraordinary feature of the late autumn was the immensity of Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*) and Stock Dove (*C. oenas*) movement, and the observations—particularly from the Channel coast—point to most of this being emigration. However, the first report, from Folkestone (Kent), was of 10 coming in off the sea. A few were moving over Leatherhead (Surrey) on 31st October, and 5 left Portland Bill (Dorset) flying W.S.W.; but on this day the only large party was of 400 going south at St. Agnes (Isles of Scilly). In calm anticyclonic weather on 1st November there was westward passage over Boxley (Kent) and about 110 flew over Leatherhead from the N.N.W. At Selsey Bill (Sussex) there was a certain amount of coasting, both east and west, and at 07.15 hours a flock of 100 flew out to sea to the southwest, though some may have returned as 30 passed in the opposite direction shortly afterwards. Large numbers of Woodpigeons were reported to be in Berwickshire at this time.

Activity was again marked with a return of anticyclonic conditions in the St. George's Channel region on 4th November, especially at St. Agnes where Stock Doves were also concerned, a flock of 200 flying north-north-east. Great Saltee (Co. Wexford), after a single tired bird on the 3rd, had 500 passing from south to north on the 4th, with fewer next day and 20 on the 6th. There were said to be very many pigeons at this time in the southern part of Ireland. On the 5th 8,400 were counted passing north at Titchfield Haven (Hampshire); there that was the peak of a movement which started at the beginning of the month and lasted until the 15th. On the 7th at Selsey up to 600 were flying in from the sea and out from the land between 07.15 and 07.50 hours, and a vast flock of about 2,500 came from the south and flew inland at 08.10 hours; at this time there was a high over southern England. Next day there was small movement to west and south at Leatherhead, while at Portland, 65 Stock Doves in parties of up to 7 were flying out to sea and returning, and one party of 18 was seen to come in high. There was small-scale passage at Great Saltee on the 10th, and large flocks were seen flying high at Folkestone on the 12th. On the latter day, too, unusual movement of both species was noted at Frocester (Gloucestershire) in the hour following 07.15, with 238 moving south and 92 south-south-east in 14 flocks, the largest containing 80 birds.

The Channel coast again saw much activity on 15th November, with considerable emigration from Portland, and 850 Woodpigeons flying from east to west off Selsey between 06.50 and 11.00 hours. At Portland 110 of nearly 900 Woodpigeons left south and 116 to the S.S.W., while 7 of 100 Stock Doves departed south and 10 S.S.W., many more birds flying out but subsequently returning. These movements took place during the clearance of a vigorous depression which affected the country on the 13th-14th. There were 200 birds coasting north over Folkestone on the 17th.

There was tremendous southwards migration at Spurn Head (Yorkshire) on the 20th-21st, and even larger masses moving south-east in the Thanet region of Kent, while on the second of these days activity spread to Portland and Selsey, and a little north-east passage was observed at Frocester. At Spurn more than 3,100 Woodpigeons were counted on the 21st, with a few Stock Doves and "hundreds" of feral pigeons of Rock Dove type (*C. livia*), again in improving weather after the passing of an active depression. It is difficult to know where so many feral doves might have originated, unless they came from north-east Scotland where this is a common bird. At Thanet the passage on the 20th included 6,000 birds in one quarter-hour spell, and it was estimated that more than 20,000 passed on the following morning. There were 70 Woodpigeons at Portland on the 21st (with 27 Stock Doves on the 22nd and 14 next day), and 200 flew out to sea at Selsey Bill at 07.45 hours, a few also coasting from west to east on both days.

On the 28th passage was again strong at Spurn and included over 1,410 Woodpigeons, while an immense exodus of both species took place at Portland Bill. A ridge of the Azores high extended to the English Channel bringing a light west-south-west wind. Over 15,000 birds, estimated at two-thirds Woodpigeons and one-third Stock Doves, went over Portland in three great flocks to south-west and S.S.W. between 07.45 and 08.15 hours. This seems to have been the last large-scale movement, but 260 or more went south at Spurn on 5th December, and at Selsey Bill on the 13th, in typical col weather, 22 were seen to go out to sea to the south and then return early on 13th December.

R. K. Murton, of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food, is collecting data on the Woodpigeon movements during this period and we should be grateful if any observations which suggest migration could be sent to him at Infestation Control Field Research Station, Tangley Place, Worplesdon, Guildford, Surrey.

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Types C.F.18 and C.F.24 (8×30.5 mm.) are highly favoured by bird-watchers, C.F.24 having an extra wide field of view which is particularly valuable for observing birds in flight. With those who prefer a higher magnification, type C.F.43 (10×42 mm.) is a firm favourite.

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